

Aboriginal Health, Healing, Spirituality,
practice. The readers of the journal have an
Truth and Forgiveness
interest in teaching the Bahá'í Faith, serving
Diana rose Yoka
its administrative organs, and participating
in its community life. It is also of interest to
those studying the model that the Bahá'í
community offers for the resolution of
contemporary problems.
Volume 3, 2001

ISSN 1442-2875 Volume 3, 2001

AUSTRALIAN
BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

Editors: Note to
Contributors

Vahid Payman and Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei

Australian Bahá'í Studies is open to submissions on all
subjects. But it particularly seeks articles of practical
Association for Bahá'í Studies Australia - Board:
relevance to the Australian Bahá'í community, and which
2001-2002: might

not be readily published elsewhere. These may
Ahmad Aniss, Borhan Borhani, Sima Hashemi, Sandra include
analyses of specific teaching methods, projects,
Langshaw, Vahid Payman, Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei, Ashley and
outcomes; reports on issues of management,
Reynolds

leadership, and administration; application of the Bahá'í
Teachings to issues of concern in Australian society;
2002-2003:
community histories; biographies; literary essays; and
Ahmad Aniss, Borhan Borhani, Sima Hashemi, Bidar essays
on Bahá'í theology and religious studies.

Homsey, Christopher Jones, Wimali Lakmini Weerakoon
Contributions may be in the form of essays, review articles,
case studies, and reports on research in progress.

Australian Bahá'í Studies is a publication of the Association
for Bahá'í Studies Australia. The views expressed in this The
editors are seeking papers that have the following qualities:
Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily
reflect the opinions of the Editors or the Board of the • The
paper has clearly defined and properly focussed aims
Association.

- The paper makes a contribution to thinking on the subject
Editorial policy

Australian Bahá'í Studies promotes analysis of issues relevant to the Australian Bahá'í community. It encourages exploration of the history, teachings, and philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith in systematic, reflective, or artistic ways. It thus offers itself as a medium of communication for anyone who is interested in the development of the Australian Bahá'í community. In view of the Bahá'í vision of scholarship as an activity accessible to all, rather than one limited to a small academic community, Australian Bahá'í Studies seeks input from people of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, in a way that assists in redefining what is meant by scholarly practice. The readers of the journal have an interest in teaching the Bahá'í Faith, serving its administrative organs, and participating in its community life. It is also of interest to those studying the model that the Bahá'í community offers for the resolution of contemporary problems.

Mona Vale Rd,
 Ingleside NSW 2101
 email: abs@bahai.org.au

Layout & cover design: Stephen Beale
 ISSN 1442-2875

Contents

Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney..... 3
 Peter J. Khan

Competing for the Oneness Of Mankind:
 The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games 14
 Kiser Barnes

Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths 28
 Mark T. Wood

Meditation and Health 54
 Paul Friedman

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá'í Exploration 78

Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei

Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities: The
Deep Connection and what Bahá'u'lláh had to say
about it 99

Ron House

Aboriginal Health, Healing, Spirituality, Truth and
Forgiveness 113

Diana rose Yoka

Notes on Contributors 124

2 Australian Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney

3

Dedication of the Bahá'í

House of Worship in

Sydney

Peter J. Khan

With the approach of the fortieth anniversary of the Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Mona Vale, on the outskirts of Sydney, on 16-17 September 1961, the time seems appropriate for me to convey my personal impressions of an event which may properly be described as marking a milestone in the emergence of the Australian Bahá'í community.

Comprehensive reports of the events associated with the Dedication were published in the "Australian Bahá'í Bulletin" in October 1961 and in the

United States "Bahá'í News" in December 1961. My comments, which should be regarded as supplementary to those reports, are offered in the hope that they will convey an additional perspective from one who was involved in the process, as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly and as the Secretary of the Temple Dedication Committee.

The National Convention:

The story of the Dedication opens at the National Convention held in Sydney at Ridván 1961. It was clear to all attending this event that a serious,

and indeed critical, situation existed. The Dedication date had been announced well ahead of time, and overseas visitors were making plans to attend, in addition to the commitment made by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum to play a leading role in the Dedication, following the pattern instituted when she dedicated the Temple in Wilmette in 1953 as the representative of the Guardian.

However, the construction had proceeded slowly, and convention delegates were deeply dismayed to see how much remained to be carried out to complete the edifice. Despite generous contributions by the Guardian and the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land, acting as Custodians of the Faith, the

bulk of the construction cost was falling on the small Australian Bahá'í community, which was composed of people of modest resources. As a result, the funds contributed fell well below the amount required; the builders, Welch
4 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Brothers, had become aware of this, and were apprehensive about the prospects for securing the necessary funds from an organization as obscure as the Bahá'í National Assembly.

In addition, the builders found themselves encountering constructional problems far beyond their experience and expertise. No dome of such dimensions had been built in the region. The marble cladding process to be used for the exterior surface of the building was not well developed. No crane was available of sufficient size to place in position the flèche at the apex of the dome. Building work in Sydney was almost entirely on conventional, rectangular structures; innovative architecture such as the Sydney Opera House lay in the future.

Anxious and apprehensive, the delegates consulted at length about whether or not to recommend that the National Spiritual Assembly defer the Dedication until the construction was complete. As a Convention officer I was in a good position to observe the dynamics of this consultation. On the one hand were those whose orientation was spiritual – but carried to the extreme of impracticality – urging the group to disregard entirely the apparently bleak prospects for completion, and to rely solely on the movement of spiritual forces which would miraculously solve all problems if the step of faith was taken; they were aided by the small band who confidently anticipated physical calamities to envelop the planet before 1963 and who urged completion on schedule to avoid the prospect of the envisaged major social disruption further deferring completion of the Temple.

On the other hand were found sound practical realists, some with business experience, who argued passionately that it was folly to proceed to an irrevocable commitment to the September Dedication while so much uncertainty existed about the pace of construction, and the level of contributions. They also pointed out that too little time remained for arranging the Dedication ceremonies.

Eventually the following Convention recommendation was adopted for consideration by the National Spiritual Assembly:

“That every effort be made to hold the Temple Dedication next September, but, if necessary, the Dedication be postponed.”

The wording was a marvel of compromise, offering solace to all points of view.

Actions of the National Spiritual Assembly:

Eight members of the Assembly gathered at the Hazíratu'l-Quds some two weeks after the National Convention, with Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone – who was at that time a member – absent in Central America to attend the inaugural National Conventions of Honduras and Nicaragua. The

meeting was dominated by the imperative need to resolve the Dedication question, over which the Assembly members were almost evenly divided. I recall clearly the earnestness of the consultation, and the several occasions during which we turned in prayer for guidance as we wrestled with this seemingly insoluble issue. We felt the weight of responsibility most keenly during this process. There were extended periods of silence, with each member analysing the diverse views, and yearning for illumination. When we felt ready to vote, the mood of the meeting was such that several members did so with tears in their eyes, well aware of the consequence of their actions. Having decided to proceed with the September date, the National Spiritual Assembly set in motion a number of practical measures to resolve its problems. It arranged a meeting with the Architect, Mr. John Brogan, and the principals of Welch Bros., where the Assembly decision was announced. It was clear that we could not provide the funds by the time of the Dedication. However, we committed ourselves to fully meeting our financial obligations in due course, so that a satisfactory arrangement was reached by which payment was carried out progressively over an extended period, not being completed fully until 1965. The total cost of the building was £214,000, considerably in excess of the architect's initial estimate of £150,000 because of the extraordinary measures necessary to solve the various constructional problems.

The Assembly decided not to reappoint the Temple Construction Committee, and assumed responsibility itself for the acceleration of the pace of building. The Assembly met with the builders on the site every month when it gathered in Sydney for its regular meeting. Between meetings I was assigned the task of going to the site every Saturday afternoon to meet with representatives of the construction team, and to prepare an itemized report, which was mailed to all members on Monday morning. Their comments and questions, conveyed to me by telephone if necessary, were presented at the following Saturday afternoon meeting at the Temple site.

In these days of email and fax communications, it strains credulity to recall that in 1961 the Xerox machine was unknown in Sydney, and multiple copies could be made only by the use of carbon paper or by resort to duplicators with inked cylinders and wax stencils. For the weekly reports I chose to

make 9 copies using carbon paper inserted between sheets of the thinnest paper I could buy, called onion-skin. One of the consequences of this indolent approach was that the ninth copy was only semi-legible at best, and had to be sent to the Assembly member I judged to be most tolerant or having the greatest visual acuity. The original was crystal-clear but suffered from a proliferation of small holes where my pounding of the manual typewriter keys with enough force to impress the ninth copy had surgically dissected the looped paper in letters such as o, e, g, and a; the result was a document

having the beauty and appeal of fine Irish lace!

6

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

A Temple Dedication Initial Planning Committee was constituted on 14 May, with a mandate to consider the Dedication needs and report back at the next Assembly meeting on 9 June. At that time it was reconstituted, with the same four members, as the Temple Dedication Committee and assigned its duties with 14 weeks to accomplish them, and a total budget of £1,000 for such purposes as rental of halls, hiring buses and temporary seating at the Temple, food catering, printing of programmes, and the conduct of a major public meeting.

Temple Dedication Committee:

This Committee functioned in a simple but effective manner, aware that it was desperately short of time and grievously lacking in resources or experience. Even now, some four decades later, I thrill at the memory of the manner in which the great majority of the Sydney metropolitan area believers rallied to the needs, working sacrificially to the point of exhaustion, displaying decision-making qualities they were unaware they possessed, and deliberately refraining from seeking reimbursement for many of their expenses. We formed nine sub-committees, the names of which indicate the scope of the work: hall arrangements; transport and accommodation; catering; taperecording and public address; printing; publicity; devotional programme for Dedication; choir for Dedication service; post-Dedication one-day tour. Time did not permit circulation of comprehensive minutes and reports. Each member of the Dedication Committee supervised the work of two or three subcommittees and acted as a member of those bodies. The Committee met weekly, where the individual members reported on their sub-committees; from those meetings a consolidated report went to the monthly National Spiritual Assembly meetings, together with its recommendations and requests for guidance. On two occasions, in June and in September, just before the Dedication, a meeting was held for all Committee and sub-Committee members, to ensure that all those involved were well informed and that the proper coordination occurred.

Despite our best efforts, there were some gaps and deficiencies in the organization; fortunately they were overcome through the good judgement and initiative of individual sub-committees members who discreetly extended their endeavours to meet the needs. In some instances, sub-committees proved incapable of carrying out their functions; the responsibility of preparing a draft of the Dedication devotional programme had to be reassigned to Adelaide believers at the last minute, as did the task of printing the programmes for the Dedication ceremonies.

Unfortunately, there were some exceptions to this description of the community response to the challenge of the approaching Dedication. A small group of believers, including a few sub-committee members, were incurably pessimistic, and lost no opportunity to criticize or denigrate the efforts of Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney

others. Ultimately their role inadvertently became beneficial, in that the rest of the community resented their negativity, and was motivated to prove them wrong through achieving a highly successful Dedication.

Dedication Publicity:

Four decades later it is difficult to comprehend the magnitude of the obscurity in which the Bahá'í Faith in Australia was enshrouded in 1961. Australia was very much a racially homogeneous country sheltering within the confines of the White Australia Policy, solidly Christian with appalling misconceptions about the other religions of the world. In such a setting we sought to take advantage of the Dedication to secure publicity for the Faith. Among our many limitations was the fact that neither of the two Publicity Sub-Committee members, of which I was one, had any experience of this field, to which was added the fact that funds did not permit our securing professional advice.

The situation was resolved by the occurrence of what appears in retrospect to have been something of a miracle. We prepared an advance-notice press release, delivering it by hand to the principal newspapers and other media outlets. Late one afternoon I visited the "Daily Telegraph" newspaper,

located then in Castlereagh Street, Sydney, clutching the press release. The front desk referred me to an experienced reporter, Mr. Pat Burgess, who was free at the time and was prepared to see me, probably because he had no idea of the meaning of the word "Bahá'í" and was curious. In the ensuing discussion with me, it soon became clear to Pat that I was totally inexperienced in the field of public relations and had no real idea about what I was doing. He insisted that I sit down, gave me a pad of paper to take notes and dictated over

the next one hour and a half, a comprehensive set of measures which should be carried out to take full advantage of the opportunities.

Central to the strategy he set out was that efforts be made to secure a feature story at an early stage in one of the afternoon newspapers, since these papers were always searching for material. This article could then be used as a springboard for publicity in other media. This was achieved, with a twopage spread in "The Sydney Sun" newspaper on 30 August, and accomplished its purpose. The other measure he advocated was an endeavour to persuade the Lord Mayor of Sydney to hold a Mayoral Reception for Rúhíyyih Khánúm and other Bahá'ís; if this could be arranged, it would give a much-needed sense of legitimacy to the Dedication proceedings, and would open many doors at media outlets. It was achieved also, and is described in some detail later.

Building on the "The Sydney Sun" interview and the commitment of the Lord Mayor, we could confidently approach the major newspapers to consider special supplements, supported by paid advertisements from the builders and

other contractors, and to interest radio and television stations, popular

8

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

magazines such as "Australian Women's Weekly" and "Woman's Day" as well as cinema newsreel producers such as Movietone News. The "Reader's Digest" resisted our efforts to have a colour picture of the House of Worship on its cover, but did mention the word "Bahá'í" on the cover, a seemingly minor accomplishment which had a far more beneficial effect in the Pacific

Islands than we had envisaged. A three-page list of the publicity items appears in the October 1961 Bulletin but does not include magazine articles which appeared during that month.

The Lord Mayor's Reception:

The National Spiritual Assembly made a formal approach in writing to the Lord Mayor, Alderman Harry Jensen, followed up by several meetings I held with his Executive Aide, who carefully studied brochures and booklets on the Bahá'í teachings. Following several days of anxious waiting, we were exhilarated to receive the news that the Lord Mayor would host a reception for Rúhíyyih Khánum and a number of other guests up to a specified limit on Wednesday 13 September 1961.

It fell to the National Assembly to decide who was to be invited to the Mayoral Reception. It assigned the task to me, in view of the need for the selection of overseas guests to be made almost at the last minute when it was clear who would be available. The Assembly specified that about half the number should be from other countries, and the Australian component should include interstate representation if possible.

In my ignorance I thought this to be a reasonably straightforward task when compared to the various crises which were arising on almost a daily basis. Little did I realize the intense feelings which were aroused among a few Bahá'ís from the Sydney metropolitan area who felt, for various reasons including their own perception of their social standing, that they should have been invited. I was subjected to a barrage of telephone calls, at home and at my laboratory, as this small number of indignant people tried to pressure me to add them to the list; clearly they felt that a university student from a rural

background was incapable of appreciating either the subtleties of the issue or the teaching opportunities which would result when they told their neighbours later of their participation in a Mayoral Reception in the Sydney Town Hall. Since I was much more concerned about obeying the National Spiritual Assembly than about the offence I was causing, I was able to resist their pressures without undue distress.

Bahá'ís of the present day, four decades later, cannot possibly appreciate the sense of exaltation which all the believers invited to the Mayoral Reception felt, when we were received by the Lord Mayor in the Town Hall, and witnessed the dignity and respect he accorded to Rúhíyyih Khánum. From a position of unmitigated obscurity, the Faith had now progressed to a point

where television cameras and newspaper reporters were clamouring to record
Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney

9

the honour being shown by the Lord Mayor of Sydney to our representatives. Harry Jensen proved to be a genuine and gracious host, taking a sincere interest in the diversity of peoples from 19 countries who formed our party. A minor aspect was his shock of recognition when I arrived, designated by the National Assembly as the escort of Rúhíyyih Khánum. I had some months previously organized a complex University Commemoration Day event in which Mr. Jensen and I, together with another student, had played a central role, much to his enjoyment. As a consequence we greeted each other with unusual warmth, to the puzzlement or consternation of some others.

The Dedication Events:

The official reports well describe the various events held with the participation of 320 believers from 19 countries. This was the largest gathering of

Bahá'ís ever held in Australia; contrast this to the present day where one local Bahá'í community, that of Brisbane, has itself a greater number of believers.

Three events stand out in my memory, each with its own distinguishing characteristic. One was the Dedication itself on Saturday 16 September, with 300 Bahá'ís gathered, in a spirit of joy and thanksgiving that this vast enterprise had been successfully accomplished. There was a sense of victory at this achievement, and a surge of confidence in the power of the Faith to accomplish the seemingly impossible.

Second was the Public Inaugural Service on Sunday 17 September. No words of mine can convey the excitement of Rúhíyyih Khánum as we drove along Mona Vale Road from the city, and saw the roadside lined with parked cars for hundreds of yards in each direction from the entrance to the Temple grounds. Police were directing traffic, television cameramen jostled for the best positions, and the eagerness of the public to be part of the occasion, all contributed to the air of celebration. One very busy policeman received fleeting fame, when interviewed by a newspaper reporter to give his impressions, through his description of the white Temple edifice as "the angel of Sydney".

Over 2000 people were accommodated in two devotional services in a packed Temple auditorium. We were dimly aware that life for the Bahá'í Faith in Australia would never be the same; although we were sufficiently realistic to know that this level of public interest would not endure, we were aware also that, on this pleasant Sunday afternoon in September, we were crossing a bridge into a new and enduring degree of public awareness, with our days of obscurity left behind.

The third highlight was on Friday evening 15 September, when 250 believers gathered at the Macquarie Auditorium in Sydney to hear Rúhíyyih Khánum speak to us for two hours about the progress of the Faith, its plans

and activities, and especially about Shoghi Effendi. All present left the meeting with a heightened sense of family – that the Bahá'í community was not a

10

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

congregation in the traditional religious sense, was far more than an assemblage of adherents to a religious belief, but was, in a very real sense, united

by bonds as strong, or even more so, as those within a happy family. This sense of close relationship was intensified by our common experience of the grief at the recent passing of Shoghi Effendi, and our deep awareness of the need for sacrificial action in service to the Faith, so that the Universal

House

of Justice could be brought into being at Ridván 1963.

Personally significant to me, some years later, was my attendance at the inaugural Hyde-Dunn Memorial Lecture in the Marriott Hotel in Sydney on 15 September 1995, knowing that this was the exact spot on which had stood Anzac House where a Public Meeting had been held on 16 September 1961, with Rúhíyyih Khánum as the featured speaker to an audience of 400 people.

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum:

This account would be incomplete without further reference to Rúhíyyih Khánum, who was the first and only member of the Holy Family to bless the Australian continent with her presence. She came to Australia accompanied by Miss Jessie Revell, Treasurer of the International Bahá'í Council, with whom I developed immediately a warm friendship. Both were ill: Rúhíyyih Khánum had contracted a very bad cold, which had weakened her and resulted in prolonged and uncontrollable coughing spasms from time to time, much to our distress; Jessie Revell had fallen while en-route to Sydney, and had badly bruised an ankle and an elbow, which caused her much pain. Both were determined to discharge their responsibilities to the extent possible. However the "Daily Telegraph" newspaper, which gave almost daily coverage to the events of the Dedication, carried a brief article on 15 September headed "Sickness of Bahá'í Leader" which was greeted with mixed feelings

by Rúhíyyih Khánum.

The National Assembly asked me to act as their escort and to drive them to the various meetings; my cynical Bahá'í youth friends were astonished at the sudden improvement in my driving skills, and my newly-found scrupulous adherence to all traffic laws. One ostentatious Bahá'í visitor from abroad looked with disdain at my Holden vehicle with which I carried out these duties, and tried to pressure me to allow him to rent a Cadillac for this purpose. Fresh from surviving the Lord Mayoral Reception, I had no trouble resisting his pressures, so that I had no need to resort to informing him that 1961 Sydney was devoid of any Cadillacs, much less such vehicles for rental. The only transportation incident worth noting was my success in locking the car with the key still in the ignition when I took Rúhíyyih Khánum for a

media interview before the Dedication events began. Rúhíyyih Khánum solved the problem by stepping out into the traffic to wave down a passing NRMA service operator, who was able to open the Holden with alarming ease, using a bent piece of wire.

Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney

11

There were few hotels of international standard in Sydney in those days. The National Assembly, rejecting both the Hotel Australia adjoining Martin Place and the newly-built Chevron Hotel in King's Cross as being too ostentatious, selected the Carlton-Rex Hotel, then located on Pitt Street, to accommodate Rúhíyyih Khánum and Jessie Revell. This created a new problem for

me, as the National Assembly in session gave me firm instructions that I was to arrange payment of their hotel accommodation, using funds it placed at my disposal. Innocently I made the appropriate arrangements with the front desk at the hotel, after the guests had checked in. The first sign that this simple process was too good to last occurred next morning when I came to pick them up. Jessie Revell was the first to arrive in the hotel lobby to meet me. After the customary greetings, she informed me in a pleasant conversational tone that "Do you know that Rúhíyyih Khánum has decided to chop your head off?" I confessed myself unaware of this prospect, disclosed a great personal interest in the subject, and was enlightened by Jessie that Rúhíyyih Khánum insists on paying her expenses when travelling. Caught between the firm insistence of the National Assembly and the unyielding position adopted by Rúhíyyih Khánum, I sought unsuccessfully to persuade Rúhíyyih Khánum through appeals to reason and the administrative authority of the National Assembly. I made a pathetic and unconvincing effort to arouse her feelings of pity at the unenviable position I was in. Attempts at compromise failed also, and I chose abject surrender as an optimal survival skill, confident that the National Assembly would show mercy to me.

I will forever remain grateful to the opportunity of informal association with Rúhíyyih Khánum during the days around the Dedication. I was struck by her endless curiosity, her genuine interest in people in all walks of life, and her keen intelligence. I was at that time engaged in electronics research which impinged on the newly emerging scientific field of radio-astronomy. She was not aware of this subject but her ability to ask incisive questions and to both absorb and integrate new information enabled her to very quickly acquire an impressive grasp of the key issues and the potential of this field. Uppermost in my memory is that Macquarie Auditorium meeting, to which I have referred. Rúhíyyih Khánum was still grieving over the passing of Shoghi Effendi but forced herself to recount her experiences of World Centre life with him, being aware how eager were the friends to hear about them. Exploring these memories took an emotional toll on her, greatly exacerbated by a question from an unthinking member of the audience to the effect of "What did you think when you found that the Guardian had passed away?" Rúhíyyih Khánum gave a kindly answer, but it was clear to Jessie Revell that

the question had distressed her greatly and she alerted me to this fact.

When the meeting was over, Jessie and I joined Rúhíyyih Khánum who told us she felt very unsettled and not ready to return to her hotel. We found a small coffee shop and took some refreshments. Rúhíyyih Khánum was

12

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

plunged in gloom, and our efforts to divert her had no effect. On other occasions I had teased her, as gently and respectfully as I could, but when I tried

this time her only response was to issue the instruction “Jessie, you have one

good leg, you kick him!” which my friend Jessie chose wisely to ignore.

As the evening continued, Jessie was clearly very tired and we delivered her to her hotel. Rúhíyyih Khánum remained unsettled and we drove along the darkened streets of Sydney, which was in those days devoid of any latenight life. Eventually Rúhíyyih Khánum announced that she was hungry, and felt she could sleep if she ate something.

Where was I to take her? I was sufficiently familiar with King’s Cross to know that it was out of the question. I was vaguely aware that there were a few elegant supper clubs in the centre of the city, none of which I had ever entered; desperation forced me to suggest them, only to find them rejected. Eventually Rúhíyyih Khánum clarified her thinking to the point where she decided she wanted a good hamburger. This was most alarming to me, even though it cast me on familiar territory as a consequence of my late-night excursions in the city in search of hamburgers when carrying out my research experimentation at Sydney University. I was well aware of the small number of places where hamburgers were available late at night. Most provided a product of appalling standard, but one was excellent – that in George Street at Central Square adjoining a petrol service station catering to all-night taxis.

My alarm was that I knew from experience that the clientele of this place was drawn from the seamiest segments of Sydney life, including those of highly dubious professions. The thought of Rúhíyyih Khánum meeting with such uncouth and profane customers was beyond me.

I told her that we would go to Central Square but that I would leave her in the car while I obtained the hamburgers and we could eat them in the vehicle.

I was silently congratulating myself on having resolved the problem when we arrived in the precincts of the place and Rúhíyyih Khánum decided she was also thirsty and needed coffee with her hamburger. There was no option but to accept the dictates of fate, and so we entered this setting, while I silently uttered a fervent prayer that no Bahá'í would discover that I had taken

so eminent and so honoured a guest of the Australian Bahá'í community to such a place.

The memory remains with me today. The hamburger shop had no seating, with all clients standing at the counter, jostling for space if necessary.

Coffee

was provided in thick mugs so sturdy that they would damage the concrete floor if dropped on it. Rúhíyyih Khánúm stood in the midst of this scene, surrounded by taxi-drivers and women of the night, captivating all by her bearing and her genuine interest in them. The entire atmosphere was changed from its usual rowdiness and abuse to one of calmness and quiet, as she brought more and more people into the conversation through her sincere interest in them and her friendliness. The others present were totally unaware of who

Dedication of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney

13

she was, but reacted spontaneously to her presence by refining their manners, speech, and relationships. Rúhíyyih Khánúm had a wonderful time, and left the shop animated and glowing, lifted out of her sadness.

As I reflected on this experience in later weeks, I drew many important lessons from it: the virtues of sensitivity and a non-judgemental attitude in individual conduct; the implications of our avowed commitment to the oneness of humankind; the means of attracting others to the Faith through our involuntary and unstudied expression of Bahá'í teachings in daily life. These are but a few of the experiences associated with the memorable visit of Rúhíyyih Khánúm to Sydney, a bounty which gave us a new awareness of the monumental achievements of the Guardian and which brought us closer to the World Centre of the Faith.

Conclusion:

Despite the passing of forty years, it is still too soon to assess accurately the significance of the Temple Dedication. I have referred already to the increase in confidence of the Bahá'ís, the strengthening of the bonds of family, and the welcome enhancement of public awareness of the Faith and its Temple. The believers realized, almost with a degree of surprise, that they belonged to a religion which was admired by the public for its inclusiveness and reasonableness, which further strengthened their self-confidence. The Temple Dedication triggered a surge of teaching activity all over Australia in pursuit of the Ten Year Crusade goals. As reported at the Dedication Conference there were 14 Local Spiritual Assemblies in Australia in 1961, identical with the number existing at the commencement of the Crusade at Ridván 1953. This number had to be doubled in the 19 months remaining till Ridván 1963. That this formidable goal was achieved, and indeed surpassed, was a measure of both the spiritual energy released in the Bahá'í community as well as the degree of sacrifice made by the friends in all parts of the country.

The practical needs in the aftermath of the Temple Dedication forced us to rise to a higher level of efficient functioning. Provisions had to be made for caretaking, cleaning and the maintenance of the building and its surrounding areas. Guides were required for the steady stream of visitors, and weekly devotional services had to be planned, conducted and supported by regular attendance. All was accomplished, often through heroic efforts of believers

who sought no recognition or expressions of gratitude, but found their satisfaction and fulfilment in the act of service. In so doing they established a

pattern which continues in Australia to the present day.

14

Australian

Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Competing for the

Oneness Of Mankind:

The Influence of the Bahá'í

Faith on the Olympic Games*

Kiser Barnes

From 15 September to 1 October 2000, the world will celebrate the Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. The Bahá'ís of Sydney have placed the Cause in a winning position by ensuring that the 350,000 visitors hear about the Faith. Four billion people worldwide will tune in to at least part of the largest peacetime event in history. It is the first time the Olympic Games will be held in a city with a Bahá'í House of Worship. A beautiful

full-colour

pamphlet about the Faith has been distributed to hotels, tourist centres, domestic and international airports, and at the Olympic Village. The Temple was painted inside and out. A website about the Faith is prepared. As to how the Olympics have aroused the believers to action was presented in the Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, September 2000 under the article, "Sydney Bahá'ís

go for Olympic gold".

At the start of the Games, the spirit of competition, the ardour for winning, the tension and excitement that builds in every Olympic year stir in the heart a combination of feelings and questions about spiritual victories versus material achievements. This presentation attempts to demonstrate that the Bahá'í Teachings and the experiences of the Faith provide a new way of looking at the Olympics. Are the Games caught up with the spirit of the age - the

oneness of humankind? What do the Bahá'í Teachings say about competition?

How has the Revelation enhanced certain values which are cultivated

by the 10,300 athletes from 200 countries who will compete in the Games?

Are the Olympics connected with something far greater for humanity than the glory of sport and the love of country, namely, the oneness of peoples and nations - as the title of this presentation suggests?

* A Presentation delivered at the Bahá'í World Centre September 8, 2000

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games

15

The fierce contest afoot in the world between religion and the forces of ungodliness also comes to mind. At stake is the triumph in human history of the fundamental spiritual principle of our age - the oneness of mankind - described by Shoghi Effendi as, "the pivot around which all the teachings of

Bahá'u'lláh revolve.”¹ On this theme the Guardian wrote, “A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its

ultimate consequence, is being waged” for the unification of humankind.² It is this planetary contest between the spiritual and the material that provides an excellent perspective for considering whether the Olympics’ spectacular tapestry of races, peoples, colours, and nations advances the principle of the oneness of mankind.

The spirit of competition the Olympics excites invites a comparison between some of the hard fought victories won by the Faith to Olympic successes. For this purpose, some features of the heroic struggle out in the

Mázindarán province of Persia at Tabarsí in 1848 have been selected. The run away triumph of Mullá Husayn, Quddús and their companions demonstrates that the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith is a compelling factor in the Olympics’ universal attraction. The heroic contests reveal as well that spiritual

values foster victories, even Olympic achievements, and establish excellent criteria for evaluating triumphs. For, in the days to come, the world will rejoice that a small band of untrained, frail body believers, at the cry, “Mount

your steeds, O heroes of God”³, competed with their lives against desperate forces of spiritual oppression, so that their Faith could win a place in the world.

The Influence of the Revelation

The impact of the Faith on the fortunes of the Olympics is directly connected to the penetrative influence of the Word of God. The Revelation’s creative power operates upon society through Bahá'í institutions and believers and through progressive movements, like the Olympics. Although, it is clear that only the Word of God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh can achieve the

revolutionary regeneration of society, the Olympic movement, promoting international cooperation, is a remarkable development towards world unification.

The revival of the Olympic Games in 1896 is an aspect of that “unity of thought in world undertakings” which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá said the nations would

1. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, (2nd rev. ed., Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,

1974), p.42. The Guardian also describes the principle as “ the chief and distinguishing feature of the

Faith He (Bahá'u'lláh) proclaimed”, “the cornerstone of Bahá'u'lláh’s world-embracing dominion”,

and “the foundation of the Faith of God and the distinguishing feature of His Law” p.36.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

3. Nabíl-i-A'zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandí), *The Dawn-Breakers*, Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of

the Bahá'í Revelation. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932), p. 341.

4. David C. Young, *The Modern Olympics, A Struggle for Revival* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 81-95.

16

Australian

Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

achieve as one of the “Seven Candles of Unity”⁵. The great variety of international gatherings of world leaders called by the United Nations, the growing number of transnational projects, congresses, conferences, summits, and global events of every sort, including such great sports events as the African Cup of Nations, the Commonwealth Games, and the Olympics, champion the spirit of internationalism, global identity and the oneness of mankind. The Games illustrate that “universal fermentation” which Shoghi Effendi said,

“...in every continent of the globe and in every department of human life, be it religious, social, economic or political, is purging and reshaping humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established.”⁶ Thus, through the compelling power of the Revelation the Olympics are connected with the social and spiritual evolution of mankind.

Religion and the Ancient Olympic Games

The influence of the Faith on the Olympics is also consistent with the impact of religion on the evolution of sports contests. Scholars in the history of sports have discovered that many athletic activities began as religious events.

Primitive people competed through games against invisible and visible forces that threatened their survival. Games were played to promote fertility among crops and animals. Tribes played a cup-and-ball game to symbolically “catch the sun” for the growing season.⁷

The ancient Olympic Games began as a religious festival held every four years successively for a thousand years. They were held in 776 BC through 393 AD. Everything connected to the competitions was linked to religion. Only Greeks could participate and the events symbolised the unity of the Hellenic population. The contests took place in a sacred valley called Olympia, named in antiquity after Mount Olympos, the highest mountain in Mainland Greece and in mythology the home of the greatest Greek gods and goddesses. The Games were held in honour of Zeus, the king of the Greek deities.⁸ The Games struggled on until 393 AD, when the Roman emperor

Theodosius abolished them⁹. It took 1503 years for the Olympics to return in its full international flavour in 1896, when the modern Olympics began in Athens. It was the Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertine who revived the Olympic idea.¹⁰ He envisioned that the modern Olympics would eventually become both symbol and centrepiece of a new global era of togetherness

5. Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (Haifa: Bahá'í World

Centre, 1978), p. 32.

6. The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, op. cit. p. 170.

7. Charles S. Prebish, ed. Religion and Sport, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), p. 83.

8. M.I. Finley and H.W. Pleket, The Olympic Games: The First Thousand Years (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1976), pp. 6-10, 14-24.

9. William Oscar Johnson, The Olympics, A History of the Games, (Times, Inc., New York, 1996), p.9; Finley and Pleket, *ibid.* P.13.

10. Young, op. cit. p. 81.

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games 17

among nations.¹¹ The Games are indeed a symbol of a new era of global unification, but the concept of the oneness of mankind, as revealed by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, is the true centrepiece of the new age of global unification.

Principle of the Oneness of Mankind

For example, Shoghi Effendi explained that the unity of nations implies that “national rivalries, hatreds and intrigues will cease and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and cooperation.”¹² The Games, however, have served as a surrogate battlefield for

the cold war, a stage for terrorists and protests of every sort. In some ways, the Olympics are still about the need for the symbolic satisfaction of nations who have used them in a political way to prove the superiority of their cultures, traditions, or political social systems. As we look back some of the incidents have been quite amusing. Some host nations have refused to fly the flags of nations they had disagreements with along with the other flags in the Olympic stadium. Olympic officials have carried runners they favoured across the finish line to keep others from winning.¹³

Hitler saw the Summer Games in Berlin in 1936 as an opportunity to spread the blatant Nazi anti-Semitism, the false religion of Aryan superiority and racial hatred. The Soviet Union made its Olympic debut in 1952, which heightened the cold war confrontations. China competed for the first time in 1984. In ancient times all wars were suspended during the period of the Olympics. In modern times, however, three Olympic games were cancelled due to war. The summer games have been plagued by boycotts. There are still nations that can send only a few athletes. The industrial nations, with better coaching, better training facilities, larger, healthier, better-educated population, and a sports culture, win most of the medals.

These setbacks, the current exposure of corruption in the International Olympic Committee, the use of banned drugs by athletes to enhance performances, indicate that a hard race is on for the spirit of the Games and for what the Olympics could symbolise for mankind. As Shoghi Effendi said:

“There are so many movements in the world . . . akin to various Bahá’í principles; indeed we can almost say that the principles of Bahá’u’lláh have been adapted by thinking people all over this planet. But what they do not realize and what the Bahá’ís must therefore teach them, is that these principles, however perfect, will never be able to create a new society unless and until they are animated by the spirit which alone changes the hearts and characters of men and that spirit is recognition of their

11. Young, op. cit. p. 81.

12. The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, op. cit. p. 204.

13. Johnson, op. cit., p. 14.

18

Australian Bahá’í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

divine origin in a teacher sent from God, in other words, Bahá’u’lláh. When they recognize this, their hearts will change and a change of heart is what people need, not merely a change of intellectual outlook.”¹⁴

The process of achieving the oneness of mankind includes the growing realization that our basic loyalty is to mankind as a whole rather than to any nation or smaller group. This is the spirit in which those involved in the Olympics must move towards. The Olympics beyond Sydney will be entirely different when the financial, coaching and other resources of the world are equitably shared under Bahá’u’lláh’s system of world order. The impact

of the Revelation will lead eventually to Games which fully reflect the spiritual principles of unity. Bahá’ís know, from the ringing clarifications of

Shoghi Effendi, that the road leading to the oneness of the whole body of nations, which will be the ruling principle of international life, is long and arduous.¹⁵ Still, the Olympic Movement is an important step in the right direction. This does not mean that Bahá’ís are blind to its weaknesses and failures. Thank goodness that most people who are caught up in cheering for their country or for certain groups no longer feel that winners from this group are superior to those who lose.¹⁶

There has emerged the most incredible claim that the Olympics is a religion; that sports is a religion.¹⁷ I was astonished to read in a well researched scholarly book on religion and sport the declaration that there is a god of running! A god of swimming! And other athletic gods!¹⁸ That sports is a more accurate expression of personal religiosity than Christianity, Judaism, or any of the traditional religions.¹⁹ This complex issue seems to be connected to Bahá’u’lláh’s words: “The weakening of the pillars of religion hath

strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant . . . the greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.”²⁰

The Writings explain that “the purpose of religion . . . is to establish unity

14. Helen Hornby, Lights of Guidance, (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust

1983), p. 425,(from letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Bahá'í Youth of Lima, Peru, 17 November 1945.

15. World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, op. cit. p. 193.

16. Torbjorn Tannsjo, "Is Our Admiration for Sports Heroes Fascistoid?" Journal of the Philosophy of Sport, XXV, 1998, pp. 23-34. The author argues that nationalism within sports is declining because of commercialisation and internationalism. He points out, however, that nationalistic values are reinforced by publicly broadcast sports events such as the Olympic Games, and nationalism's orientation towards abstract symbols: the flag, the team, as a representative of the nation (see especially p.24). Mr.

Tannsjo's basic premise is that the Olympic winners are admired based on a value judgement that those who win, if the competition is fair, are excellent, and their excellence makes them valuable. This excellence is based on the strength they exhibited in the competition. He argues that the losers are considered less valuable, because in losing they demonstrate weakness, which leads to contempt for the loser.

17. Presbish, op. cit. pp. 54-62, 74, 153, 180.

18. Ibid., p. 71.

19. Ibid., p. 71.

20. Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1953) p. 28.

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games 19

and concord amongst the peoples of the world."21 Can anyone seriously believe that basketball or soccer can eliminate the fierce hatred and prejudices in the hearts of people? The Writings reveal that "Religion is verily the chief

instrument for the establishment of order in the world..."22. Can there be a world order founded on the rules of football? Religion, unlike sports, forms a unique foundation for a general system of meaning related to ultimate issues and questions. It affects the way people think about the world, about social relations and processes and even about sports. It defines the meaning and purpose of life.

Values

Another element in which the influence of the Faith may be seen is that the Writings and the experience of believers reveal for mankind important features about the character of victories, and how to evaluate achievements. The Revelation has renewed and strengthened the very qualities that render Olympians victorious. These values, which foster victories of every kind, as well as the order of their importance to human endeavours, are set out in the Writings.

The animating influences of these qualities were demonstrated in the startling victories for the unification of humankind won at Fort Tabarsí. And by

this I mean the powerful spiritual values — vision, courage, heart, discipline,

focus, passion, trying, perseverance, and many more — manifested by the champions of Tabarsí are the strengths that make Olympic winners. The value orientation underlying competitive sports, excellence, fairness, etc., may

seem unconnected with religion. But, those values that are central to sports, whether in relation to successful individual or team achievements, are more or less secularized versions of the core values of religion.²³

Perhaps, only Bahá'ís fully appreciate, at this time, that the great qualities that the champions out in Tabarsí showed - clarity of vision, commitment

to excellence, striving with heart, and many more - are spiritual values. The Bahá'í view on these values, whether seen in sports or other systems of endeavours, is that: “it is religion ... which produces all human virtues, and it is

these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization.”²⁴ And that: “these

virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation...”²⁵

It is from this perspective that humankind will come to realize that sports, including the Olympic Games, is merely a carrier of religious qualities. Thus,

21. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh: Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 129.

22. Ibid., p. 63.

23. Presbish, op. cit. p. 97.

24. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, (3rd ed., Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), p.98.

25. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 80.

20

Australian Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

the Olympic contenders merely exhibit some of the eternal values which, in the champions of the world, heroes even for today, out in Mázindarán, and elsewhere in the Land of the Martyrs, marked the depth of their belief. We can only comment on a few here.

VISION AND FOCUS: Mullá Husayn and that little band of companions at Tabarsí caught the vision and purpose of the contests in this way:

“You have been chosen of God,” Bahá'u'lláh addressed those champions, who went on to bequeath the world matchless examples of transformation, courage and other spiritual strength, “to be the vanguard of His hosts and the

establishers of His Faith. His hosts verily will conquer. Whatever may befall, victory is yours, a victory which is complete and certain.”²⁶ “This is the

Day,” Bahá’u’lláh has stated, “when the loved ones of God should keep their eyes directed towards His Manifestation, and fasten them upon whatsoever that Manifestation may be pleased to reveal.”²⁷ “Regard not the children of the world and all their doings but fix thy gaze upon God and His neverending dominion.”²⁸ Great athletes also come to learn that they must keep their eyes fixed on the ball, or on the target, or on the main goal; that they must concentrate fully at critical moments.

COURAGE: No sickness of the soul is worse than discouragement. Perhaps, this is why the Manifestations of God renew and strengthen the principles of courage and encouragement. The courage of the dawn-breakers was superhuman. Leaping on horseback, time and time again, Mullá Husayn and his companions decimated in every fair encounter the treacherous forces arrayed against them. These examples show that the words of God inspire courage. Bahá’u’lláh in a Word of Wisdom reveals the secret of their might:

“The source of courage and power,” He tells us, “is the promotion of the Word of God and steadfastness in His love.”²⁹

HEART: In the Olympic competitions, you won’t find the matchless manifestations of spiritual strength, or physical strength, that Mullá Husayn and his companions exhibited out in Mázindarán. The manner in which they sallied out to defend the Cause arouses new insight into what it means to compete with, or to show, heart when facing challenges. Among athletes heart is regarded as one of the most essential values. It is a mysterious quality. The dawn-breakers possessed it on a grand scale. All the world loves the heart of a competitor who refuses to give in. The person who seizes opportunities. The contender who exerts herself far beyond

26. The Dawn-Breakers, op. cit. p. 349.

27. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 171.

28. Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, op. cit. p. 139.

29. Ibid., p. 156.

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá’í Faith on the Olympic Games 21

capacity. People love to witness souls involved in wholesome contests who will not accept defeat when it would be reasonable to do so. This is what heart does. This is what the martyrs showed the world. Heart is grounded in exuberance, a kind of irrational commitment to an endeavour. Heart involves an enthusiastic, spontaneous, uncalculating, innocent and sometimes even a naïve response. It involves becoming involved with the world. It is the behaviour of those who are young and young at heart. It enables one to answer the call, for better or for worse, in situations where others fear to tread, or are indifferent.³⁰

Heartful service to God is like this, where believers come to understand that the true victory must first occur in the heart. Bahá’u’lláh has

revealed:

“Say, the power of God is in the hearts of those who believe in the unity of God and bear witness that no God is there but Him, while the hearts of them that associate partners with God are impotent, devoid of life on this earth, for assuredly they are dead.”³¹ Those who serve or play with heart often become hardened to reason. Often there is a lack of self concern. We see something of heart in the Olympics, as a result, I think, of the impact of the Revelation. Youth competing for gold for themselves and for their nation, with extravagant flings of energy, with grace and poise, with courage and heart, will also be competing symbolically for the oneness of mankind. Speaking of gold, when the believers out at Tabarsí struck out for the headquarters of the imperial army, undaunted by the overwhelming forces arrayed against them, they penetrated the apartments of several princes. They discovered coffers filled with gold and silver, all of which they disdained to touch.³² The gold of God’s good pleasure was sufficient for His hosts. Perhaps, those believers turning away from those treasures reminds you of Atalanta’s race. You know the tale — how the princess, Atalanta, tall and

wild and beautiful, one of the swiftest runners in Greek mythology promised the king she would marry him who outraced her. Those who failed must die. With her eyes fixed on the ideals of chastity, freedom and service, she raced across the mountains. Many challengers were slain. The cunning Hippomenes laid three golden apples over the course. The beautiful Atalanta fled like a shadow. The first apple startled her. She paused. But even as Hippomenes stretched his hand, she sprinted away. The innocent maiden hovered over the second golden apple. But slipping again from Hippomenes’ hot grasp, she flew over river, vale and hill. Then, she lingered over the third apple. The weight of the three apples slowed her down, and Hippomenes easily passed her by. The greed of gold defeated the youth in the race of her life. In the

30. See John Corlett, “Virtue Lost: Courage in Sport”, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, XXIII, 1996, pp. 45-57.

31. Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in the compilation, *The Power of Divine Assistance*, (National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, 1982), p. 15.

32. *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit. p. 367.

22

Australian

Bahá’í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

flush of victory, Hippomenes forgot to thank the goddess, Aphrodite, for her help. In her wrath, the snubbed goddess transformed Hippomenes and Atalanta into giant cats. And so, according to Greek legend, they stay to this day, the beautiful but lazy lion and the swift lioness.

TRYING: I have the impression that the world senses that deep inside the Olympics there is something dear to be found. All the competitors will be trying their best to win. How well does the value of trying speaks of the

influence of the Faith. In the martyrs it was shown in their humility, vision, nobility, and confidence. It is the spirit of trying which quickens and sustains

true champions. The notion of trying also involves an irrepressible intention and willingness to serve with heart. It is not the full accomplishment of the service but simply the willing of it. Trying is a kind of learning. It is a focus

on the transformation of the self and not on others.

Much could be said about the values of striving for excellence, learning the fundamentals of the endeavour, the importance of training, initiative, seizing opportunities, the sense of urgency, each person playing his part, the execution of plans, anticipating responses, absorbing setbacks, obedience to those with higher responsibilities, the passion for winning, the importance of teaching oneself, etc. All of these will be exhibited in the Sydney Games. From our perspective, all of these, and more, have been demonstrated in the experiences of the Faith and are promoted in the Bahá'í Scriptures.

The experience at Fort Tabarsí shows that humanity lives and moves through faith. The source of the martyrs' heroism was the ardour of their faith; unquestioning belief in the Manifestation; the vision of God's mercy, generosity, and the triumph of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; a passionate love for

Him, Who is "the Victorious,"³³ "the Giver of victory"³⁴, "He Who knows the

reality of victory"³⁵. The believers at Tabarsí were champions of vision and commitment. Their story is that of hard work, commitment, guts, confidence, loyalty, and noble behaviour, benchmarks for building the world.

Competition

There are some who feel that athletic games, even the Olympics, are trivial pursuits. How does the Faith regard competition? Do the Prophets manifest physical valour? The Olympics is fundamentally competitive. In contrast, it is often thought that religion is fundamentally noncompetitive. The Bahá'í Writings permit competitiveness, in which a spirit of service to God and mankind, and love of others, is encouraged. However, the spirit of self-promotion and defeating others in order to exalt oneself is discouraged. Bahá'u'lláh's words on the subject are clear: "Vie ye with each other in

33. Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975), p. 120.

34. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, op cit. p. 125.

35. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, op cit. p. 196.

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games 23

the service of God and of His Cause. This is indeed what profiteth you in this world, and in that which is to come."³⁶ Shoghi Effendi announced with a great deal of satisfaction that "(the) Knights (of Bahá'u'lláh) ...are vying

with each other for the spiritual conquest of the unsundered territories and islands on the surface of the globe.”³⁷ He urgently appealed to all Bahá’í

communities in 1951 to “vie with one another in emulating the example of their African sister communities ranking among the youngest in the Bahá’í world . . .”³⁸ A little later, he alerted believers, “. . . the Pacific area, . . . (was)

now competing for the palm of victory with the African continent itself.”³⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised that students should practice gymnastics as part of their

education.⁴⁰ Shoghi Effendi allowed that, “Playing games is not in the least forbidden. It should be encouraged if they are of an athletic nature.”⁴¹

Thus,

participation in athletics is a matter of individual discretion.

In their human station, the Prophets exhibited physical valour and fitness, excellence of bodily form and grace. Indeed, a sign for which the first disciples of the Báb had been told would mark His identity was that he would be

free from “bodily deficiency.”⁴² On the glorious day, following the declaration of His station in Baghdád, as he departed the city for the banishment to

Constantinople, Bahá’u’lláh displayed “masterly horsemanship”, as a symbol of His divine authority. During the ten year exile in Baghdád, He had always chosen to ride a mule. Thus, mounted on a stallion of the finest breed, for the first time the startled population marvelled at His “splendid horsemanship”.⁴³

As to His response to those who dared to compete with Him, the words of Bahá’u’lláh are quite explicit: “O concourse of divines! Can any one of you

race with the Divine Youth in the arena of wisdom and utterance, or soar with Him into the heaven of inner meaning and explanation? Nay, by My Lord, the God of mercy . . . Can the one possessed of wooden legs resist him whose feet God hath made of steel? Nay, by Him Who illumineth the whole of creation”⁴⁴.

And: “O ye leaders of religion! Who is the man amongst you that can rival Me in vision or insight? Where is he to be found that dareth to claim to be My equal in utterance or wisdom?”⁴⁵

36. Quoted in, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (3rd ed., Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1975), p. 83.

37. Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1965), p. 117.

38. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá’í World 1950-1957*, (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1958), p.73.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

40. *Star of the West*, *The Bahá’í Magazine*. Published from 1910 to 1933 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978)

vol. 9, p. 91.

41. From a letter dated 27 December 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly.

42. *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit. p. 57.

43. H. M. Balyuzi, *The King of Glory*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), p.165.

44. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the kings and leaders of the world* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1967), p. 76.

45. *Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), p. 23.

24

Australian

Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

The exclamation of Quddús, upon seeing the Báb for the first time, rings with wonder: “Why seek you to hide Him from Me? I can recognize Him by His gait.”⁴⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was said to have been “a strong and excellent swimmer” and “a fearless horseman”⁴⁷. Shoghi Effendi loved sports. During his days at Oxford, he played tennis, “a game he loved and in which he excelled.” Laughing most of the time while he played, he was marvellously active in the sport, ambidextrous and possessed lightning speed.⁴⁸ Perhaps, the physical valour of the Central figures and of the beloved Guardian may contribute to the promotion of wholesome athletic competitions. But will anyone dare to race in the days to come without recalling Bahá'u'lláh's forced, barefoot run through a hostile, jeering mob from Shimírán to the Siyáh Chál of Tihrán? Will weight lifters lift their burdens without recalling that Bahá'u'lláh was fastened down with chains in the dungeon prison?

The Symbolic Character Of The Games

An element of the influence of the Faith on the Olympics may lie in the manner in which the Faith seems to have strengthened the symbolic character of the Games. The world's acceptance of its symbols may be the Olympics' most outstanding breakthrough. The Olympic flame stands for the concept of the sacred fire of ancient times. It expresses the struggles necessary to maintain unity. It recalls the myth of Prometheus, the Greek demi-god, who stole the fire so that mortals could prepare food, vanquish cold and darkness and become almost equal of the gods.⁴⁹ It was at the Games in Berlin in

1936 that the Olympic flame was lit for the first time.⁵⁰

The flame is said to represent youth, their thoughts and actions. It is borne to the Games by a system of relay torches. This symbolizes that he who held the torch was the weary runner passing the fire to a fresh runner, who is stronger. Like the old generation passing on the torch of service to the young. The Olympic flame stands up straight. Sometimes the winds bend it briefly, but it bravely stands up again. It represents an upright life. Lit during the

spectacular opening ceremony, it burns day and night in the Olympic stadium through the duration of the Games.⁵¹ How much more nobly could this flame glow if it would remind the world of words of Bahá'u'lláh that:

“The

Word of God hath set the heart of the world afire.”⁵²

In the days to come the Olympic flame may cause mankind to wonder

46. *The Dawn-Breakers*, op. cit. pp. 69-70.

47. Blomfield, Lady (Sitárih Khánúm), *The Chosen Highway*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1967),

p.87, p. 191.

48. Riaz Khadem, Shoghi Effendi in Oxford, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1999), pp. 102, 103.

49. Much of this section is taken from the excellent article by Luc Silance,

“Symbolism in Olympism-

Symbolism in Art” *International Olympic Academy*, 26 Session 1986, pp. 116 to 129.

50. *Ibid.*, p.120.

51. *Ibid.*, p.120.

52. *Gleanings*, op. cit. p. 316.

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games 25

how the people far away up in the mountains of Mákú denied the Báb even a candle to light his prison cell. Or perhaps, it may recall the candles Mullá Husayn placed in the hands of each of his companions at Fort Tabarsí, as they rushed out to meet Quddús.⁵³ I want to share with you the words of the Master, which I feel summarize beautifully the symbolism of light. “The time has come when all mankind shall be united, when all races shall be loyal to one fatherland, . . . and racial and religious bias pass away. It is a day in which the oneness of humankind shall uplift its standard and international peace, like the true morning, flood the world with its light.”⁵⁴

The marvellous Olympic symbol, the five intertwined rings of blue, yellow, black, green and red represents five parts of the world: Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and America respectively. It stands for the unification of the nations, which, as stated earlier, Coubertin wanted to unite through sport.⁵⁵

It was in 1920 that the Olympic flag bearing for the first time the symbol was presented.⁵⁶

Speaking of flags, it may be recalled that Mullá Husayn at the instruction of the Báb unfolded the “Black Standard” that symbolised a new religion was on the march. Under this banner, Mullá Husayn, and his fellow-disciples, fearlessly proclaimed the message of the New Day.⁵⁷ Like all flags generally, it was a symbol of identification, evoking feelings of devotion and pride. It was “that earthly emblem of an unearthly sovereignty (which) waved continually over the heads of that small and valiant band, summoning the multitude who gazed upon it to renounce the world and to espouse the Cause

of God.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

During the Olympics millions will be aroused by the flags and the national anthems. Nationalism, individualism, and secularism are parts of the evolution of the Games and will have to run their course. But many will cherish the appeal of honest, wholesome, noble endeavour, athlete against athlete.

Competitors honouring themselves, their country, and their opponents with their very best performances. Perhaps, there are Olympic enthusiasts who can imagine with us that the athletes will compete for the oneness of mankind.

That all those who support the Games are advancing the principle of world unity. Perhaps, the Games will help the world see that mankind can have no true life until it is one. And should the Games last until the end of the

Bahá'í

Dispensation, there will always be athletic heroes to cheer, and, perhaps, a

53. The Dawn-Breakers, op. cit. p.352.

54. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p.

153.

55. Silence, op. cit. p. 119.

56. Ibid. p. 122.

57. Dawn-Breakers, op. cit. p. 325.

58. Dawn-Breakers, op. cit. p. 351.

26

Australian

Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

little girl who will tumble the length of a balance beam, and in one perfect instant achieve the kind of transcendent greatness that will live forever in the hearts.

But the Olympic medals are trifling in comparison with winning the gold of striving for God's good pleasure, won by the heroes of the Faith. The world will come to learn that the great competitive zeal, focus and dedication, which have ever animated Olympic winners, are no match for the ardour of faith which transformed and quickened the dawn-breakers. This is

easily the most striking feature of the comparisons we have drawn: that the spectacular Olympic victories are far less important than the victories won for God. The Faith enables us to treasure the true character of spiritual victories in relation to other successes, even in relation to the winning of Olympic

gold. All the world will eventually rejoice, I think, in this component of the greatness of the Revelation.

So we have gathered up in the days before the Olympics considering the influence of the Cause. We are resolved upon our present course of vying with the world for its unification. For we know that “He Who leadeth to true victory is come.”⁵⁹ Take care to have the influence of the Faith keep us alert

to the cunning of Hippomenes. Take care to recall the influence of the Faith that lies in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words that our joy can be perfected by arising for

the triumph of the Cause.⁶⁰ Take care to remember that mankind eventually comes to love its religious heroes. Take care, then, to be influenced by the lamentation in the Fire Tablet: "Dost Thou wail, or shall I wail? Rather shall

I weep at the fewness of Thy champions."⁶¹

From the youth who were out in the Mázindarán province, we learn that competition in the path of God and victory is one. Bahá'ís everywhere are still racing with the world to achieve that ultimate victory which

Bahá'u'lláh

promised. From the influence of the Faith on the Olympic Games and on all progressive movements, and in the spirit of the symbolic character of the Games, we take the torch of fire from the dawn-breakers. We, too, are stirred by the passion of the Games. But whether the ardour runs to basketball, football, swimming, gymnastics, or track or field events, it does not match our zeal for the principle of the oneness of mankind. It doesn't matter that at

this time only a few million cherish the victories for the unification of mankind gained by the "lion-hearted" believers out in the Mázindarán province,

who, at the cry, "Mount your steeds, O heroes of God", made the Word of the Lord of Hosts triumphant.

Let us take heart and consider that the Olympics are among those forces which, as Shoghi Effendi says, "whether or not cognizant of the regenerating Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in this age are operating, each in its respective sphere

59. Gleanings, op. cit. p. 259.

60. Bahá'í Prayers, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 203.

61. Ibid., p. 214.

Competing for the Oneness of Mankind: The Influence of the Bahá'í Faith on the Olympic Games 27

and under His all-encompassing guidance, for the uplift and salvation of humanity."⁶² Let the fire of the Olympic contests symbolise that the struggle begun at Tabarsí is still unwon. May the Olympic Games remind us that we are competing in the service of God. May they inspire us to say to Mullá Husayn, Quddús, Táhirih, and all the martyred champions, heroes for the unification of peoples and nations: 'Rejoice! For your spirit of victory is alive in us. And we are worthy of you. For we, too, have mounted our steeds, O Heroes of God, for the glory of the oneness of mankind.'

62. Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) pp. 145-147.

28

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Genealogical Background
of the Founders of the
Bábí and the Bahá'í
Faiths
Mark T. Wood

Foreword

Genealogy and the chronology of a person are almost always important for creating a skeleton structure upon which to place or fill in other important

historical data. See, for example, any entry in biographies/autobiographies or books like *Who's Who in the World*.

Arabic and Persian names are particularly difficult for the western reader to differentiate, pronounce and/or remember. Many names seem to be the same yet belong to different people and can only be differentiated by the context in which they appear.

For example, Robert Balyuzi writes in *Khadijih Bagum the Wife of the Báb*: "Finally, it may prove useful if I refer the reader to ... The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, The King of Glory. For in these are to be found many of the persons and incidents mentioned in this essay, but in their wider context. The reader's path may also be eased if, whilst reading the essay, reference is

made to the *Genealogy of the Báb ...*" (*Khadijih Bagum the Wife of the Báb*, p. xii)

It is interesting to note that four men, with rather varied backgrounds, had two or more direct descendants that married the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or Bahá'u'lláh's siblings and/or direct descendants.

1. Mirza Isma'il-i-Vazir of Yalrud, was a Persian of great wealth. His son married Bahá'u'lláh's sister Sarih Khanum & his daughter became Bahá'u'lláh's first wife.

2. Haji Mirza Ali, was a Persian and the paternal uncle of the Báb's mother. He had one daughter that married the Báb, one grandson that married Bahá'u'lláh's daughter, Furughiyyih, and two grandsons that married

Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths
29

Bahá'u'lláh's granddaughters Diya'iyyih Khanum and Tuba Khanum.

3. Mirza Siyyid Mihdi-i-Nahri was a man of great wealth. His granddaughter married Bahá'u'lláh's son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and his great-grandson married his great-granddaughter who was also Bahá'u'lláh's granddaughter

Ruha Khanum.

4. Shaykh Sultan, was an Arabian. His daughter married Bahá'u'lláh's brother

Mirza Musa. His granddaughter married Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mirza Muhammad-Ali and his grandson married Bahá'u'lláh's daughter, Samadiyyih Khanum.

Most dates of the dates given in this compilation, and not footnoted, will be found in the reference, A Basic Bahá'í Chronology by Glenn Cameron with Wendy Momen (1996).

A number of dates required some degree of extrapolation from the literature. For example: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife Fatimih [Munirih] Khanum, was mentioned as being born about the time the Conference at Badasht was taking place (i.e. circa 1848) with no clear date being noted for her birth, in the references used. (Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p. 44, 341)

Some dates were easy to find and footnote, e.g. as, for Bahá'u'lláh and Mahd-i-'Ulya's son: Mirza Diya'u'llah born 15 Aug. 1864, later, lived near

Haifa, fell ill, died on 30 Oct. 1898. (Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p.

222, 277, 'Abdu'l-Bahá : The Centre of the Covenant p. 527)

And, some dates seemed to conflict. The parents of Shoghi Effendi:

Diya'iyyih Khanum married Aqa Mirza Hadiy-i-Afnan (in 1894, 1895, or 1896 according to the reference used). Again, the birth date of Shoghi Effendi, as known by his wife and, noted on the column of his sepulchre was (Monday) 3 March 1896. After his death, Shoghi Effendi's notebooks, written in his own hand revealed, in fact, that he had been born on Sunday, 1 March 1897. (Shoghi Effendi, p. 186, The Priceless Pearl, p. 4)

Further clarifying information, as it comes to light, would be most welcome.

General Introduction

“It is sometimes remarked that very few women appear in the histories of the Middle East of the last century. The reason for this is that there is often no information written down in contemporary records about them. Most chroniclers of the time considered women so insignificant that very little was recorded, or even orally transmitted, about their lives. Thus the researcher into this period can rarely find more than a cursory mention of the women who were obviously involved in the events of their day.

“The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the equality of women and men and sets

30 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

out the requirements for its establishment as a reality in society. We must now progress quickly towards the day when all people everywhere accept this truth and women are accepted into full partnership with men in all aspects of life. Only then will the true contribution of women to the progress of human civilization be wholly recognized and properly recorded.”
(Day of Glory: The Life of Bahá'u'lláh, by Mary Perkins 1992, p. 182-183)

“Even when speaking as a man, however, Bahá'u'lláh speaks as God's messenger, as a living example of entire devotion to God's will. His whole life is actuated by the Holy Spirit. Hence no hard and fast line can be drawn between the human and divine elements in His life or teachings.”
(Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era by J. E. Esselemont 1980, p. 46)

“The overwhelming and all-pervasive power of God is infused into every atom of His being that in every action He portrays the signs and tokens of divine power. Those endowed with spiritual insight can see in every move of the Manifestation of God, the attributes of God unmistakably apparent. His thoughts, His words, His actions are all motivated not by human soul but by the Divine spirit.”

(The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh by Adib Taherzadeh 2000, vol. 4 p. 135)

“Please God, that we avoid the land of denial, and advance into the ocean of acceptance, so that we may perceive with an eye purged from all conflicting elements, the worlds of unity and diversity, of variation and oneness, of limitation and detachment, and wing our flight unto the highest land and the innermost sanctuary of the inner meaning of the Word of God.”

(The Kitáb-i-Iqán, translated by Shoghi Effendi, 1994 ed., p. 160)

I am greatly indebted to my half-brother John F. Wood (a Bahá'í living in Canada) for introducing me to the Bahá'í beliefs, which led to my membership in the Faith. In the preparation of this work, I would also like to acknowledge the help extended to me by Daryush Arjomand of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Gold Coast and other members of the Bahá'í Faith.

Mark T. Wood

November 2000

Gold Coast

Queensland, Australia

Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

31

Immediate Genealogy of the Báb (Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad)

Born 20 Oct. 1819 – Martyred 9 July 1850

Declaration of Mission – the night of 22 May 1844

“He [the Báb] would be young - neither tall nor short – large, kind, dark eyes, finely pencilled brows. He would not smoke, nor drink alcohol. He would be uninstructed in the learning of the world, His knowledge would be immanent. He would be of the ‘Pure lineage,’ that is a Siyyid, a descendant of the prophet Muhammad.”

(The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys 1991 ed., p. vii, The Chosen Highway 1970, p. 12)

The parents of the Báb were descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Both parents of the Báb came of a family that took but one wife.

His father, Siyyid (Mirza) Muhammad – Rida (died 1820), a mercer of Shiraz, Iran, married Fatimih – Bagum (died 1882) the daughter of Mirza Muhammad-Husayn, a merchant of Shiraz.

Fatimih – Bagum, had three brothers. The Báb, their only child, after His father's death, was raised by His maternal uncle Haji Mirza Siyyid 'Ali (surnamed Khal-i-A'zam) one of the Seven Martyrs of Tihiran.

(The Dawn-breakers 1975, p. 51, The Báb 1975, p. 32, The Chosen Highway 1970, p. 14, 76, 77)

The Báb had two wives: Khadijih – Bagum and Fatimih.

1. The Báb married in Aug. 1842, Khadijih-Sultan-Bagum (b. 1820 – died 15 Sept. 1882). Khadijih – Bagum was beautiful with lovely dark hair and eyes, and soft creamy skin.

She was the daughter of Haji Mirza Ali, paternal uncle of the Báb's mother. Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim and Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan (the 'Great Afnan'), were her brothers. She had two sisters, Zahra Bagum and one married to Haji Mirza Siyyid Ali. Their father was not wealthy. [Khadijih-Bagum, later, made a request to Bahá'u'lláh for His daughter, Furughiyyih's hand in marriage for her nephew Haji Siyyid 'Ally-I-Afnan, a son of the 'Great Afnan']. (The Báb 1973, p. 46)

A beautiful account of the Báb's first marriage in 1842 was given by Khadijih – Bagum.

When Ahmad Their son died at birth in 1843, the Báb stated:

“...that He was not destined to leave any progeny, ...”

32

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

The Báb commented to Khadijih regarding one of her dreams “... You awoke too soon. Your dream portends that our life together will not last more than two-and-a-half Years.” (Khadijih Bagum by H. M. Balyuzi 1981, p. IX, 1, 2, 5-7, 33, 35)

In 1846 the Báb bequeathed all His property jointly to His mother and to His wife who was to inherit subsequently the whole estate. (The Báb by H. M. Balyuzi 1973, p. 103)

2. The Báb married in 1847, 15 year old Fatimih (born 1832 – died Dec. 1916). She was a sister of Mulla Rajab-'Aliy-i-Qahir, a Bábí from Isfahan. This was after much insistence by Manuchihr Khan, the Governor of Isfahan. This marriage occurred during the Báb's six-month's sojourn in Isfahan. (Revelations of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 2, p. 262)

When the Báb was taken away from Isfahan by the orders of Haji Mirza Aqasi, the Báb had forbidden marriage after Him with either of His two wives.

See statement attributed to Fatimih, preserved in University Library of Cambridge.

(Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith by H. M. Balyuzi, 1970, p. 34-35)

Circa 1855, Mirza Yahya (some years after the Báb's martyrdom in 1850)

“.... inflicted dishonour upon the Báb, by marrying His second wife (Fatimih)

and giving her a month later in marriage to Siyyid Muhammad.”

(The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh by Adib Taherzadeh 1980, vol. 1 p. 249)

“Bahá'u'lláh spoke to them on that day about Mirza Yahya and his crew, during the Baghdad period; how Mirza Yahya took as his wife the sister of Mulla Rajab-'Ali, the second wife of the Báb, and then gave her to Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahani, despite the injunction of the Báb. This shameful deed, Bahá'u'lláh said, had prevented the mother of the Báb from giving her allegiance to the faith.”

(Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, by H. M. Balyuzi, 1980, p. 418)
Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

33

Immediate Genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh (Mirza Husayn-'Ali Nuri)

Born at dawn, 12 Nov. 1817 - Passed away at dawn, 29 May 1892.

Declared Himself Manifestation of God – 22 April 1863

“The face of him [Bahá'u'lláh] on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!”

(Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith p. 56)

Bahá'u'lláh's father: Mirza Buzurg, Vazir-i-Nuri (Mirza Abbas-i-Nuri), noted calligrapher, was the son of Mirza Rida-Quli Big of the village of Takur, in the district of Nur, of the province of Mazindaran. Descended from Yazdigird III, the last king of the Sasanian dynasty (A.D. 226-651).

Bahá'u'lláh's father: Mirza Buzurg (died 1839) had seven wives, three of whom were concubines. He was survived by seven sons and five daughters.

Bahá'u'lláh's mother: Khadijih Khanum had been married once before and was widowed. She had one son and two daughters by her first marriage.

Mirza Buzurg, Vazir-i-Nuri with his second wife Khadijih Khanum had five children, Bahá'u'lláh was their third child. (Bahá'u'lláh –

The King of

Glory, p. 13, 17, 277)

1. Sarih Khanum married in 1832 Mirza Mahmud, the son of Mirza Isma'ili-Vazir of Yalrud. Sarih Khanum ('Ukht') died in Tihran c. 1879.

2. Mirza Mihdi died young before 1839.

3. Mirza Husayn-'Ali (Bahá'u'lláh).

4. Mirza Musa Aqay-i-Kalim had two wives and seven children. He died in 'Akka 1887.

5. Nisa Khanum married Mirza Majid Khan-i-Ahi, a secretary of the Russian Legation.

Bahá'u'lláh's three wives: Asiyih Khanum, Fatimih Khanum Mahd-i-'Ulya, Gawhar Khanum. (Servant of the Glory 1999, p. 301-305)

“Bahá’u’lláh’s marriages were typical of a man of His class – His father had had children by four wives and three concubines – and were considered perfectly proper, being in accord with both Muslim and Bábí
34 Australian Bahá’í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

law. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá however refused to take a second wife despite the law of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas [K ¶63] permitting it and the urgings of various Bahá’ís eager for Him to marry their daughters. Later He essentially prohibited polygyny and the practice quickly died out among the Bahá’ís.” (Bahá’í Studies Volume I: Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time 1996, p. 261-262)

Bahá’u’lláh married Asiyih (Navvab) Khanum (b. Oct. 1820 – d. 1886) in Oct. 1835.

The sister of His brother-in-law, a child of Mirza Isma’il-i-Vazir of Yalrud. “...adding wealth to wealth”. Navvabih came to be known as, “the Most Exalted Leaf”, winsome, vivacious, and exceedingly beautiful. She was tall, slender, and graceful, with eyes of dark blue - a pearl, a flower amongst women.

He was 17 years old and as soon as she came of age, He married her, when she was very young. (The Chosen Highway p. 39, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh vol. 1 p. 19, 49, 259, Bahá’u’lláh – The King of Glory, p. 23, 311)

They had seven children; the first that survived childhood was born nine years later.

1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Abbas Effendi born 22 May 1844 – died 28 Nov. 1921) “the Exemplar of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh” “the Greatest Branch” married in 1873, a young widow, Fatimih (Munirih) Khanum (born 1848 – died 30 April 1938).

They had four daughters (and five children who did not survive childhood).

2. Baha’iyyih Khanum (born 1846 – died 15 July 1932) “the Greatest Holy Leaf” did not marry. Neither she nor her brother, Mirza Mihdi, had children.

3. Mirza Mihdi (1848 – 23 June 1870) Named for an uncle. “the Purest Branch” did not see his parents from 1853 until 1860. He was finally brought to Baghdad, in the company of Mahd-i-‘Ulya (Bahá’u’lláh’s second wife). Previously, he had been left in the care of his maternal grandmother. Mirza Mihdi, later, was one of Bahá’u’lláh’s amanuenses. (A Basic Bahá’í Chronology p. 63-64)

Bahá’u’lláh’s sister Nisa Khanum was married to a secretary of the Russian Legation. And, one of His aunts, (one of Mirza Buzurg’s sisters) was married to Mirza Yusif, a Russian subject, and a friend of the Russian Consul in Tihran.

In August 1852 Bahá’u’lláh was unjustly thrown into horrendous imprisonment in the Siyah-Chal of Tihran. It was here, Bahá’u’lláh received the

intimation of His Revelation.

After months of suffering, the Russian Consul came to His aid, stating:

“I have determined to extend the protection of Russia to this innocent nobleman; therefore beware! For if one hair of his head be hurt from this moment, rivers of blood shall flow in your town as punishment. You will do well to heed me in this warning, my country is behind me in this matter.”

[The Russian Government had also offered a refuge.]

The Governor, consequently gave orders that Bahá'u'lláh should be permitted to come forth from prison with his life. It was also decreed that he and

his family were banished.

Bahá'u'lláh was released (after four months imprisonment, Dec. 1852) from the Siyah-Chal. They left Tihran for Baghdad, on the twelfth day of January 1853. Navvab was pregnant with Their son (born April/May 1853 six weeks after arrival in Baghdad), ‘Ali-Muhammad. This child died (1854), while Bahá'u'lláh was two years in Sulmaniyyih wilderness. It was Shaykh Sultan who helped convince Bahá'u'lláh to return, which He did 19 March 1856. (The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 1 p. 14, 19, vol. 2 p. 202 – 209, vol. 3 204, 205, 279, 400)

Bahiyyih Khanum in The Spoken Chronicle says:

“Asiyih Khanum, my dear mother, was in delicate health, her strength was diminished by the hardships she had undergone, but she always worked beyond her force.

Sometimes my father himself helped in the cooking, as that hard work was too much for the dainty, refined gentle lady. The hardships she had endured saddened the heart of her divine husband, who was also her beloved Lord. He gave this help both before his sojourn in the wilderness of Sulmaniyyih, and after his return.”

(Bahá'í Holy Places at the World Centre, 1968, p. 78, The Chosen Highway p. 39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51)

Bahá'u'lláh married His second wife, Fatimih Khanum Mahd-i-'Ulya, in 1849.

Fatimih Khanum Mahd-i-'Ulya (born in 1828 - died in 1904) was Bahá'u'lláh's first cousin, the daughter of Malik-Nisa Khanum (Mirza Buzurg's sister) and Mirza Karim-i-Namadsab. According to one source, Fatimih Khanum Mahd-i-'Ulya was married to the famous cleric Mirza Muhammad Taqi 'Allami-yi-Nuri and widowed before Bahá'u'lláh married her. (A Basic Bahá'í Chronology, p. 43)

The potential importance of a second marriage is illustrated by

Bahá'u'lláh

being a result of both of His parents' second marriage.

Bahá'u'lláh was released (after four months imprisonment, Dec. 1852)

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

from the Siyah-Chal. Mahd-i-'Ulya was pregnant with Their first son, Muhammad-Ali. He was born shortly after Their arrival in Baghdad (8 April 1853) from Tihran. Ten years later on 22 April 1863 Bahá'u'lláh would declare His Mission to His companions at the Garden of Ridván. (The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 1, p. 259 - 261, Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p. 102, 277)

In December 1852, Bahá'u'lláh's back bent by the weight of the fetters in

prison, His neck swollen and injured and His health impaired went to stay with Mahd-i-'Ulya's sister Maryam and her husband. Maryam was, also, Bahá'u'lláh's cousin and the wife of His half-brother Mirza Rida-Quli, the

physician. Bahá'u'lláh favoured Maryam throughout her life, honoured her with the appellation 'Crimson Leaf' and, after her death, revealed a special

Tablet of visitation in her memory, (see also His Tablets known as the Alwahi-Maryam). (The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 1 p. 13)

When Bahá'u'lláh and Mahd-i-'Ulya (along with many others) entered the Most Great Prison (31 August 1868), she was probably nursing Their youngest son Mirza Badi'u'llah who was born in 1867 and caring for four year old Mirza Diya'u'llah at the same time.

"The ration for each person was three loaves of black bread, salty and inedible.".... "Before long, autumn set in with its attendant ailments and maladies, because of the insalubrious conditions of 'Akka'. Within the prison

walls, the exiles suffered greatly." Three exiles died that autumn, including two brothers who died in each other's arms.

Initially, Bahá'u'lláh was forbidden to associate with anyone except his wives and children. The imprisonment lasted for two years, two months and five days. (Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p. 102, 192, 203, 222, 247, 277,

283, 286, 319, 337, 408)

Bahá'u'lláh shared over forty years of married life with Mahd-i-'Ulya, from before the Siyah-Chal imprisonment in 1852, until His death in 1892. (God Passes By p. 247)

Four of Their children were entered in the Most Great Prison (31 August 1868). [Two of them already married to children of Bahá'u'lláh's brother, Mirza Musa]

1. Mirza Muhammad-Ali (Ghusn-i-Akbar) born in Baghdad, April 1853. He died 20 Dec. 1937.

He was designated by Bahá'u'lláh as "the Greater Branch", "the Second

Highest Rank". He was considered, truly a master of calligraphy. He was married by fifteen years of age to his first cousin, Liqa'iyiyh Khanum, in 1868. Mirza Muhammad-Ali and Liqa Khanum's son Shu'a'u'llah (born c. 1877?) lived in U.S.A. from 1899. Shu'a'u'llah was called back by his father to Palestine (1922). Their other children were: Musa, Amin and Asiyih.

Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

37

2. Samadiyyih Khanum (b.1856/7) was married by twelve years of age, to her first cousin, Mirza Majdi'd-Din. Later, they lived near Tiberias. Their children were Zarangiz and Maryam.

3. 'Ali-Muhammad (born c. 1858? – died in infancy or early childhood?)

4. Sadhijiyiyh, a daughter, born c. March 1862 and died c. Sept. 1863.

5. Mirza Diya'u'llah born 15 Aug. 1864, later, lived near Haifa, fell ill, died

on 30 Oct. 1898.

6. Mirza Badi'u'llah born in 1867, by 1892, he owned 1/3 of the Mansion of Bahji. His children were 'Ismat, 'Iffat, Qamar, Salah, and Sadhijiyiyh.

They lived near Haifa.

(God Passes By p. 240, 247, 249, 319 & 320, Servant of Glory p. 18, 27,

142, 144, 'Abdu'l-Bahá p. 310, 461, 527, The Guardian of the Bahá'í

Faith p.

17, 18, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 1 p. 13, 261)

Four marriages at least, including two marriages of Bahá'u'lláh and Mahdi-'Ulya's children, one marriage to Bahá'u'lláh's brother and another to one

of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's children were indirectly affected by the actions and teachings of Tahirih. Consequently the decision, here, was made to include Tahirih's

genealogical background in this compilation on the Founders of the Faith.

Qurratu'l-Ayn (Tahirih – the 'Pure One')

(born 1817 - martyred August 1852)

Tahirih's father, Haji Mulla Salih-i-Qazvini, and her uncle were mujtahids of great renown. Tahirih married her first cousin Mulla Muhammad in 1830, when she was 13 years old. Her parents arranged the marriage, as that was the custom. She bore him three children.

The Báb declared Qurratu'l-Ayn (Tahirih – the 'Pure One') the seventeenth Letter of the Living. The only one who never came into the presence of the Báb. She was chosen to announce the new Age to the followers of the Báb at Badasht in 1848.

Among the Arabians taught by Tahirih was Shaykh Sultan, whose daughter [Fatimih-Sultan Khanum] was one of the wives of Mirza Musa, brother of Bahá'u'lláh.

Mirza Musa and Fatimih-Sultan Khanum's daughter [Liqa Khanum] married Muhammad-Ali, half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá." And their son Mirza

Majdi' d-Din married Samadiyyih Khanum, half-sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Tahirih escaped arrest when government officials, who were searching for her, arrested Shams-i-Duha by mistake. (Shams-i-Duha later became the grandmother of Mirza Jalal who married 'Abdu'l-Bahá's daughter, Ruha Khanum.) When Tahirih learned of this, she wrote to the Governor and told him that they had arrested the wrong woman. They must come and take her instead.

38

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Professor Edward G Browne had this to say about Tahirih:

'The appearance of such a woman as Qurratu'l-Ayn is, in any country and in any age, a rare phenomenon, but in such a country as Persia it is a prodigy-nay, almost a miracle. Alike in virtue of her marvellous beauty, her rare intellectual gifts, her fervid eloquence, her fearless devotion, and her glorious martyrdom, she stands incomparable and immortal amidst her countrywomen. Had the religion of the Báb no other claim to greatness, this was sufficient – that it produced a heroine like Qurratu'l-Ayn.'

“Bahá'ís remember her in the same way as other religions revere Sarah, Asiyih, Fatimih, and the Virgin Mary. The call she put forth at the conference of Badasht and in Tihiran marked the end of the 1200-year-old law of Islam, and the beginning of the new era.”

(The Chosen Highway p. 46, Tahirih p. 6, 10, 27, 36, 37)

Bahá'u'lláh married His third wife, Gawhar Khanum, in 1863.

Gawhar Khanum [b.?-d.?] was a Bábí girl, who had fled persecution in Kashin (Kashan?). (Servant of the Glory p. 27, 302, Bahá'í Studies: Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time p. 261)

After her marriage to Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, “...Gawhar Khanum remained with her brother in that city when Bahá'u'lláh left Iraq. Later on she

was made captive together with other believers, among them Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin, on their way from Baghdad to Mosul and received instruction from Bahá'u'lláh to proceed to 'Akka'. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this captivity in

the Tablet to the Shah. She passed away during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.”

(Memorandum from Research Department to The Universal House of Justice 19 March 2001)

Bahá'u'lláh was married to Gawhar Khanum nearly 30 years, until His ascension in 1892.

The potential importance of a third marriage is illustrated by the following:

“Bahá'u'lláh was also descended from Abraham through His third wife Katurah, thus uniting in His own person two branches of the Aryan and Semitic religions.” (Revelations of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 1 p. 7)

Furughiyyih (b.1873), a daughter, was Bahá'u'lláh's only child with Gawhar Khanum.

1873 was also the year Bahá'u'lláh revealed The Kitáb-i-Aqdas - The Most Holy Book.

Khadijih Bagum, the first wife of the Báb, c. 1882, specifically requested from Bahá'u'lláh the hand of Furughiyyih Khanum, (His and Gawhar Khanum's only daughter), on behalf of her nephew, Haji Siyyid 'Ally-i-Afnan,

[a son of her brother, the 'Great Afnan', Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan].

Khadijih

Bagum asked this so that one of the exalted Leaves of the blessed Family Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

39

may be permitted to join in wedlock with a member of the family of the Báb consequently, the two holy trees may be outwardly knit together.

Bahá'u'lláh

granted her request. (Khadijih Bagum p. 33,)

“It was during the governorship of Zivar Pasha that Furughiyyih Khanum [born 1873], a daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, was given in marriage to Siyyid 'Ali-i-Afnan. Aqa Rida has recorded that the Mutasarrif and all the high officials and notables of 'Akka attended the wedding feast. This was in the year 1885.”

(Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p. 366, 388)

The Afnans, relatives of the Báb, had extensive commercial interests. The 'Great Afnan', Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan and his son Haji Siyyid 'Aliy-i-Afnan,

with his wife Furughiyyih Khanum, and their four children (Husayn, Nayyir, Faydi and Hasan) also, lived in Beirut. A granddaughter, through son Husayn, was also named Furughiyyih. (Memorials of the Faithful p. 21- 23, 32)

Furughiyyih headed one of two groups, arguing during Bahá'u'lláh's illness in 1892, prior to His ascension, the other headed by Nabil-i-A'zam, (both

were censured by 'Abdu'l-Bahá).

In Haifa, August 13, 1909, Juliet Thompson met with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His daughter Ruha who were drinking tea with His sister Bahiyyih Khanum, and His half-sister Furughiyyih Khanum. All were enjoying a play of humor, which included spiritual advancement. (The Diary of Juliet Thompson p. 117) Furughiyyih Khanum ('Abdu'l-Bahá and Mirza Muhammad-Ali's halfsister), later [?] died of cancer. (God Passes By p. 247, 319, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 1 p. 41, vol. 2 p. 387)

Bahá'u'lláh, from 1877 until His ascension, lived with His family at Mazra'ih for two years and then at Bahji for 13 years. The younger children would have been in 1877: four year old Furughiyyih, (Gawhar Khanum's daughter), and Mirza Badi'u'llah, and Mirza Diya'u'llah

(Mahd-i-'Ulya's

sons), who were about ten and thirteen years of age, respectively. Bahji was closer to 'Akka. (The Servant of Glory, p. 89, Bahá'u'lláh – The King

of

Glory, p. 368, 369)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mother - the saintly Navvab (for the last nine years of her

life) lived with her daughter “the Greatest Holy Leaf” and her son

‘Abdu’l-

Bahá with His wife and children, at the house of ‘Abbud in ‘Akka.

‘Abdu’l-

Bahá always walked to Bahji on His weekly visits to His father. [The Covenant-breakers finally abandoned Bahji, in June 1957.]

Bahá’u’lláh’s years in marriage, summarized from the above sources, are given below:

40 Australian Bahá’í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

one wife	(Oct.) 1835 – 1849	14 years
two wives	1849 – 1863	14 years
three wives	1863 – 1886	22 years
two wives	1886 – 1892 (May)	6 years

Bahá’u’lláh had two or more wives for 42 Years (or 75% of His 56 years of married life).

He had one daughter that survived to adulthood, by each of His three wives. His daughters were:

1. Baha’iyyih b.1846 (never married),
2. Samadiyyih b.1856 (m. 1868),
3. Furughiyyih b.1873 (m. 1885).

According to the Qu’ran: “Unless a man is confident that he can be scrupulously fair to all his wives, he must remain monogamous. [Sura 4:3.] Muslim law has built on this: a man must spend absolutely the same amount of time with each one of his wives; besides treating each wife equally financially and legally, a man must not have the slightest preference for one but must esteem and love them all equally.” (Muhammad – A biography of the Prophet by Karen Armstrong 1995, p. 191)

The residential arrangements noted below for Bahá’u’lláh suggest that, during the period 1877 – 1886, He was following the above admonition, by spending 2/3 of the year with Mahd-i-‘Ulya and Gawhar Khanum. The other 1/3 He spent in ‘Akka with Nav vab.

According to Nuru’d-Din-i-Zayn:

“Normally, during the spring, summer and part of the autumn season [c. 2/3 of the year], the Blessed Perfection resided in the Mansion of Bahji and the remainder [c. 1/3] of the year in the city of ‘Akka. He used to ride a white donkey. It was called Barq [lightning] because of its ability to move fast. Any time He went from the Mansion to the Garden of Ridván, to Mazra’ih, to the Garden of Junaynih, or to ‘Akka, He rode that donkey, and returned in the same way to the Mansion. On these trips a servant always accompanied Him. Later when Barq died they brought another

donkey from Persia...it was called Ra'd [thunder].”

(The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol. 4 p. 105)

Footnotes: Regarding other animals ridden by Bahá'u'lláh

Adib Taherzadeh says: “It is interesting to note that Bahá'u'lláh rode

a

red roan Arab stallion ...” on the way from Baghdad to Constantinople. (They

arrived in Constantinople on 16 August 1863). ‘Abdu'l-Bahá “...often

used

to ride Bahá'u'lláh's horse in order to keep in contact with various

members

of the party. About an hour before entering town, He would usually bring the

Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

41

horse to Bahá'u'lláh who would then ride it into the town, while

‘Abdu'l-

Bahá took His place in the howdah; and the same arrangements were made

when the caravan was leaving the town.” (The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh,

vol. 2 p. 6.)

“In Firayjat horses were made to run a course to test them, and once

again Bahá'u'lláh's masterly horsemanship was witnessed. He had two

other

horses besides the stallion, Sau'di, one called Farangi and the other

Sa'id.

There were also two donkeys for the younger sons of Bahá'u'lláh to ride

occasionally.” (Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p.176)

Mahd-i-'Ulya, the mother of Mirza Muhammad-Ali expressed pleasure,

at the appointment of Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of the Covenant, on 7 June

1892, nine days after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. According to

‘Abdu'l-

Bahá's daughter, Tuba Khanum. (Servant of the Glory, p. 105)

Genealogy of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá – “The Perfect Exemplar”

“the Exemplar of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh” “the Greatest Branch”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá born before midnight 22 May 1844– passed away 28 Nov. 1921

(He was born in Tihran at the very time of the Báb's Declaration in Shiraz)

“He [‘Abdu'l-Bahá] is a man of medium height, though at first sight he

seemed to be much taller. He is strongly and solidly built, and weighs probably

one hundred and sixty-five pounds [75kg] .” His eyes were large, bluegrey

with long black lashes and well marked eyebrows; His face was a beautiful oval

with warm ivory-coloured skin, a straight, finely-modelled nose

and a firm, kind mouth. Long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder.

(The Flame p. 74, Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith p. 57, The

Chosen Highway p. 149)

‘Abdu'l-Bahá (Abbas Effendi) married, 8 March 1873, Fatimih [Munirih]

Khanum.

Munirih Khanum had a most beautiful voice, and her eyes were large,

dark and serene.

(Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p. 339-350, The Chosen Highway p. 73)

Fatimih [Munirih] Khanum's father, Mirza Muhammad-'Aliy-i-Nahri studied arts and sciences at the seminary of Madrisiy-i-Kasihgaran. He had been childless. However, with his wife (the sister of Haji Aqa Muhammad-i-Naqshinih-Furush, another Bábí of Isfahan), received a portion of food from the Báb, which aided in their ability to conceive. Eight months and nine days later, a daughter, Fatimih [Munirih] Khanum, was born during the summer of 1848, (she died 30 April 1938). Later they had a son Siyyid Yahya, and daughters Radiyyih & Guhar.

42

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Bahá'u'lláh, while in Baghdad in the early 1860's, intended to give His niece Shahr-Banu Khanum, (daughter of His half-brother Mirza Muhammad-Hasan), in marriage to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In 1868, both Bahá'u'lláh's half-sister (Shah-Sultan Khanum) and His half-brother (Haji Mirza Rida-Quli – the husband of Maryam, Bahá'u'lláh's cousin), refused to allow this marriage to take place, because of the fear that Nasiri'd-Din Shah and his ministers would frown on this marriage and take Haji Mirza Rida-Quli to task.

(Bahá'u'lláh

– The King of Glory, p. 342-344)

In the meantime, in Isfahan, Fatimih [Munirih] Khanum, was wedded to her first cousin, Mirza Kazim. The youngest brother of both the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of the Martyrs [both were martyred 17 March 1879]. Fatimih Khanum remained in her husband's house, until his death six months later. (The Master in 'Akka, p. 112)
'Abdu'l-Bahá and Munirih Khanum only had daughters (four) that survived to adulthood.

1. Diya'iyih Khanum (b? – d.1951) married in 1895 Aqa Mirza Hadiy-i-Afnan (Mirza Hadi Shirazi), a member of the family of the Báb.

They were the parents of Shoghi Effendi, also daughters Ruhangiz & Mihrangiz, and sons Husayn & Riyad.

(The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 2 p. 202 - 209, 387)

2. Tuba Khanum (born c.1880 – d.1959) married Aqa Mirza Muhsin, who was also, a member of the family of the Báb. Their children were Ruhi, Thurayya, Suhayl, and Fuad.

Aqa Mirza Muhsin's parents were Bibi-Jan-Jan-Bagum and The 'Great Afnan', Haji Mirza Siyyid Hasan (Khadijih – Bagum's younger brother). (The Chosen Highway p. 79)

3. Ruha Khanum married, second cousin, Mirza Jalal Isfahani. Their children

were Maryam, Munib, Zahra, and Hasan. (The Chosen Highway p. 202)

Mirza Jalal Isfahani's parents were first cousins, Mirza Hasan ('King of the Martyrs') and Fatimih Begum (the Consort of the King of Martyrs). They were married when Fatimih reached adolescence. Her mother was Khurshid Begum (Shams-i-Duha – the Morning Sun) and her father was Mirza Hadiy-i-Nahri. (Memorials of the Faithful p. 173-203)

Mirza Hasan's ('King of the Martyrs') father Mirza Ibrahim, was the brother of Munirih Khanum's father (Mirza Muhammad-'Aliy-i-Nahri) Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

43

and brother of Fatimih Begum's father (Mirza Hadiy-i-Nahri). Mirza Hasan's paternal grandfather was Mirza Siyyid Mihdi-i-Nahri.

Consequently, one of Mirza Jalal Isfahani and Ruha Khanum's great-grandfathers was Mirza Siyyid Mihdi-i-Nahri, a man of great wealth, whose father Siyyid Muhammad-i-Hindi had acquired his vast riches in India by marriage to a daughter of an Indian royal house.

4. Munavvar Khanum (b? – d. 1971) married Mirza Ahmad. They had no children.

Both Ruha and Munavvar served as English translators from Persian. ('Abdu'l-Bahá p. 461, The Master in 'Akka p. xxii, The Bahá'í World 1932-34 [Bahá'u'lláh's Genealogy], Memorandum from Research Department to The Universal House of Justice 19 March 2001)

The other children of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Munirih Khanum were:

One son Mihdi, and two daughters who died in infancy. A daughter Ruhangiz born c. 1877, died at fifteen in 1892. In 1888, another son, Husayn, died when only four years old. This small boy, an eager and active child, was greatly loved by Bahá'u'lláh. He spent long intervals at Bahji, where Bahá'u'lláh delighted in taking him for short walks. (Servant of the Glory p. XIII, 85)

"Five of my [Munirih Khanum's] children died in the poisonous climate of 'Akka. The bad air was, in truth, only the outside material reason.

The inner spiritual reason was that no son of the Master should grow into manhood. When my little darling Husayn passed away, Bahá'u'lláh wrote the following: 'The knowledge of the reason why your sweet baby has been called back is in the mind of God, and will be manifested in His own good time. To the prophets of God the present and the future are as one.'" (The Chosen Highway p. 90)

Bahiyyih Khanum states that "Many influences, and those of the very strongest character, have been brought to induce my brother ['Abdu'l-Bahá] to take a second wife – a practice which the Blessed Perfection did not in

terms forbid, but advised against. The believers have urged it strongly for several reasons. Very many of them wish to take a second wife themselves, but feel constrained from doing so by the Master's example. In Persia, except among believers, polygamy is a universal custom, and the restriction to one wife, which all believers feel and respect, seems very severe. Then there is a general wish that the Master might have a son to succeed him. Other

44

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

arguments have been advanced; and the pressure brought to bear upon him has been, and still is, very great — greater than you can easily imagine.”

“The general advice of the Blessed Perfection against a second marriage would in itself have had the effect with my brother of a command and have settled the question; but as regards him it was withdrawn by our Lord before his death. He said to ‘Abbas Effendi that he rather wished to lead the believers gradually to monogamy than to force them to adopt it, which they felt bound to do by reason of the Master's example; that therefore, and since it was much desired by all that the Master should have a son, he withdrew even the advice in his case, and desired him to consider himself free to follow his own desires and inclination.”

“To this the Master replied that his own wishes and feelings were against a second marriage, though, if the Blessed Perfection should command it, he would obey. This, however, the Blessed Perfection never did.”

(The Master in ‘Akka, p. 120-121)

“Polygamy is a very ancient practice among the majority of humanity.”
..... “Bahá'u'lláh, who was revealing His Teachings in the milieu of a Muslim society, introduced the question of monogamy gradually in accordance with the principles of wisdom and the progressive unfoldment of His purpose.”

(The Kitáb-i-Aqdas 1999 note 89, p. 206)

Bahiyiyh Khanum “the Greatest Holy Leaf”

(born: 1846 in Tihiran – died: 15 July 1932 in Haifa)

Daughter of Bahá'u'lláh “the Manifestation of God” and Navvab “the Most Exalted Leaf”. Her brother was ‘Abdu'l-Bahá the “Centre of the Covenant”. “... a gentle, slender maiden with large, grey-blue eyes, goldenbrown hair, and warm ivory-coloured skin. Her sense of humour was keen and her intelligence remarkable.

As she grew up, she implored her father to allow her to remain unmarried, that she might better devote herself to her three dearly loved ones [her parents and older brother].” Bahá'u'lláh is quoted as saying in reference to

Bahiyiyh Khanum: “I know of no man worthy to marry such purity as my daughter.” (The Chosen Highway p. 69)

“What the Greatest Holy Leaf had done for Shoghi Effendi at the time of the Master's passing and in the years that followed is beyond calculation. She had played, as he said, a unique part throughout the tumultuous stages of Bahá'í history, not the least of which had been the establishment of

Shoghi

Effendi's own ministry after the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

The Greatest Holy Leaf was left with the headship, to deal with the affairs
Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths
45

of the Cause, from 7 April 1922 – 15 Dec. 1922 by Shoghi Effendi while he
was in Europe, mostly in Switzerland. He stayed again, in Switzerland, from
June to Nov. 1923.

During the early years of his Guardianship, Shoghi Effendi included
Bahiyiyh Khanum with himself in such phrases as 'assure us', 'the
Greatest

Holy Leaf and I', 'we' and so on." In a cable sent in 1931 he even
signs it

"Bahiyiyh Shogi". (The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith p. 19, 22, 66, 67)

Genealogy of Shoghi Effendi – "The Guardian"

(born in 'Akka, Sunday, 1 March 1897 – died in London 4 Nov. 1957)

Shoghi Effendi was fine-boned, shorter than his grandfather had been, he
was more akin physically to his great-grandfather, Bahá'u'lláh. Bahiyiyh
Khanum stated that Shoghi Effendi's hands were small, like those of her
father Bahá'u'lláh, more square than tapering. Shoghi Effendi's feet
were

high arched, and also, small. His eyes were of a clear hazel colour which
sometimes changed to a warm and luminous grey. (The Priceless Pearl, p. 6)

Diya'iyiyh Khanum and Mirza Hadiy-i-Afnan (b. 1864) were the parents
of Shoghi Effendi.

Shoghi Effendi Rabbini was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson and eldest
grandchild.

Mirza Hadiy-i-Afnan's mother was Zivar-Sultan Khanum. His father was
Siyid Muhammad-Husayn, and grandfather Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim. [Haji
Mirza Abu'l-Qasim was Khadijih – Bagum's brother, and also the cousin of
the mother of the Báb.] (The Bahá'í World 1932-34 [the Báb's
Genealogy],

Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory, p. 339, 406)

Shoghi Effendi Rabbani married Miss Mary Maxwell (Ruhiyiyh Rabbani)
of Montreal, Canada on 25 March 1937, in Haifa, in the room of the Greatest
Holy Leaf.

Mary's father Sutherland Maxwell was born in 1874 and died 26 March
1952. He was President of Architects Association of Canada – designed Shrine
of the Báb, among many other buildings. He was also, appointed Hand of the
Cause in 1951.

Mary's mother was an American, May Ellis Bolles. May Ellis Bolles was
born 14 Jan. 1870, in Engelwood New Jersey. May laid the foundations for
the Bahá'í Faith in Canada. She died on a pioneer teaching trip in Buenos
Aires, Argentina, 1 March 1940.

May's father was John Bolles, an engineer. May's mother was Mary Martin.

Mary Martin's father owned the Ocean City Bank in New York, N.Y., U.S.A. May's brother, Randolph Bolles, studied at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, France. Sutherland Maxwell was a fellow student of May's brother,
46 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Randolph. (A Love Which Does Not Wait, p. 43, 49)

May married Sutherland Maxwell in Paris 1902 and moved to Canada. May Maxwell, still childless in early 1909, while on pilgrimage with her husband in Acca, personally received 'Abdu'l-Bahá's repeated prayers for her. May reported that she and her husband were consequently blessed, a year and a half later in New York, U. S. A., with their only child – Mary Sutherland Maxwell. (God Passes By p. 257, 260, Bahá'í Canada, March 2000 p. 7, 8)

Mary Sutherland Maxwell was born 8 Aug. 1910. Amatu'l Bahá Ruhiyyih Rabbani Khanum was appointed Hand of the Cause on her father's death, in 1952. She died on 19 Jan. 2000.

Shoghi Effendi was born Sunday 1 March 1897 in 'Akká. In 1918 he received his B.A. degree from the American University, at Beirut. He was studying at Oxford in England, when he became the Guardian of the Cause, on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension on 28 Nov. 1921. He wrote and worked tirelessly for the Faith until his death, from coronary thrombosis, in London,
4

Nov. 1957. Shoghi Effendi, like the Báb, was not destined to leave any progeny. (The Priceless Pearl, p. 4, 446, The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, p. 103, 106, 111, 446)

From the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

“O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsan (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi-the youthful branch branched from two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,-as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendents.”

“O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the Guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own life-time him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing. He that is appointed must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things, must be the essence of purity, must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning. Thus, should not the first-born of the guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words:-“The child is the secret essence of its sire,” that is, should he

not

inherit of the spiritual within him (the guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

47

he, (the guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.”

(Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, p.11, 12)

When Ruhiiyyih Khanum went to live with Shoghi Effendi in Haifa;

“It was especially hard at the beginning when she did not know the Persian language, for although the members of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family all spoke English, they all communicated with each other in Persian.”....”
Ruhiiyyih Khanum had a free and unsuspecting nature. She had entered this household with a sense of deep love, indeed almost veneration, for all who were related to Shoghi Effendi. What a blow it must have been so soon after her marriage to the Guardian, to first feel the winds of ill will blowing from the members of the household towards him, to recognize the signs of dissension harbouring within the bosom of his family towards the Centre of the Cause.”....“For one by one, in those early years of her marriage, the family fell away from faithfulness; the branches of Afnan and Agh[s]an broke off from the mighty tree of the Covenant. They all left, one by one, until she was alone in that house at the side of her beloved.”

“She became his shield and his sole support in those dark days of spiritual convulsion in the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. There was a time when Shoghi Effendi could not trust any member of his family to be alone with the Persian pilgrims, for fear of the negative impact of their poisonous innuendoes and inferences. He would ask Ruhiiyyih Khanum to go down and sit with them.”

(A Tribute to... Ruhiiyyih Khanum by Violette Nakhjavani in Bahá'í Canada ‘Azamat, B. E. 157 p. 7, 8.)

Apparently, none of the members of Shoghi Effendi’s family including numerous Aghsan (Branches), numerous Afnan (Twigs), or any of the many Leaves, fulfilled the criteria for spiritual succession, based on genealogy, outlined above in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Consequently, in his wisdom, by not choosing a successor, the Guardian of the Cause, provided the effective pre-conditions for the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, after his death in 1957.

References:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Memorials of the Faithful. Translated and annotated by Marzieh

Gail. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Armstrong, Karen. Muhammad – A biography of the Prophet. London: Victor Gollancz, 1995.

Bahá'í Holy Places at the World Centre. Universal House of Justice, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, England: Broadwater Press, 1968.

Bahá'í World. 89 and 90 of the Bahá'í Era – 1932 - 1934 A.D.

Wilmette,

Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.

Bahá'u'lláh. Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: A Compilation. New Delhi:

Bahá'í

Publishing Trust, 1998.

Bahá'u'lláh. The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys. Translated by Marzieh

Gail in consultation with Ali-Kuli Khan. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991.

Balyuzi, H.M. 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

Oxford: George Ronald, 1973.

Balyuzi, H.M. Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory. Oxford: George Ronald, 1991.

Balyuzi, H.M. Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith. Oxford: George Ronald, 1970.

Balyuzi, H.M. The Báb. The Herald of the Day of Days.

Oxford: George Ronald, 1974.

Balyuzi, H.M. Khadijih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb. Oxford: George Ronald, 1982.

Blomfield, Lady (Sitarih Khanum). The Chosen Highway. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970.

Cameron, Glenn with Momen, Wendy. A Basic Bahá'í Chronology. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996.

Esslemont, J.E. Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 5th rev.edn 1980.

Giachery, Ugo. Shoghi Effendi. Oxford: George Ronald, 1974.

Johnson, Lowell. Tahirih. Johannesburg: The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South and West Africa, 1982.

Munirih Khanum – Memoirs and Letters. Novato California: Kalimat Press, 1986.

Nabil-i-A'zam (Muhammad-i-Zarandi). The Dawn-Breakers. Nabil's Narrarive of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932.

Nakhjavani, Violette. A Tribute to... Ruhiiyyih Khanum. Bahá'í Canada March 2000 and May 2000 'Azamat, B. E. 157.

Perkins, Mary. Servant of the Glory: The Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Oxford: George Ronald, 1999.

Perkins, Mary. Day of Glory: The Life of Bahá'u'lláh. Oxford: George

Ronald,

1992.

Phelps, Myron. The Master in 'Akka. Novato California: Kalimat Press, 1985.

Rabbani, Ruhyyih. The Priceless Pearl. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969.

Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

49

Rabbani, Ruhyyih. The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.

Ruhe-Schoen, Janet. A Love Which Does Not Wait. Riviera Beach, Florida: Palabra Publications, 1998.

Sears, William and Quigley, Robert. The Flame. Oxford: George Ronald, 1973.

Shoghi Effendi. God Passes By. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995.

Taherzadeh, Adib. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 1. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996.

Taherzadeh, Adib. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 2. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997.

Taherzadeh, Adib. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 3. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996.

Taherzadeh, Adib. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 4. Oxford: George Ronald, 2000.

Thompson, Juliet. The Diary of Juliet Thompson. Novato California: Kalimat Press, 1983.

Walbridge, John. Bahá'í Studies Volume 1: Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time. Oxford: George Ronald, 1996.

Most dates, not footnoted, will be found in A Basic Bahá'í Chronology by Glenn Cameron with Wendy Momen (1996)

50 Australian Bahá'í Studies,

Vol. 3, 2001

Immediate Genealogy of the Founder of the Bábí Faith

Parents:

Siyyid (Mirza) Muhammad-Rida (d.1820) — Fatimih Bagum (d. 1882)

Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad was their only child.

The Báb (Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad)

(born 20 Oct. 1819 - martyred 9 July 1850)

His two wives were:

Khadijih-Sultan-Bagum (b.1820-d.1882) Fatimih (b.1832-d.1916)

married in 1842

married in 1847

The Báb stated "...He was not destined to leave any progeny, ..."

Immediate Genealogy of the Founders of the Baha'i Faith

To: The Universal House of Justice
From: Research Department

Date: 19 March 2001

Questions about the Genealogy of the Families of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Research Department has studied the questions raised by Dr. Mark T. Wood in his letter of 10 November 2000 to the Universal House of Justice. Dr. Wood explains that he is preparing, for possible publication, a compilation of materials entitled "Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faith". He attaches a copy of this compilation and requests assistance in correcting any inaccurate dates it might contain and in adding missing information, particularly in relation to Bahá'u'lláh's wife Gawhar Khánum and her daughter, Furúghíyyih, and the five daughters of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We provide the following response.

The collation of genealogical information about the Family of Bahá'u'lláh is part of an ongoing research project at the Bahá'í World Centre. As Dr. Wood rightly observes, this is a challenging task since the available historical information is scattered in a wide variety of published and unpublished books and manuscripts in both Persian and English, and there may well be discrepancies between the information that is gleaned from different sources.

While it is not possible for the Research Department to review the accuracy of the overall contents of Dr. Wood's compilation, we provide the following information concerning the particular members of the families of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá about whom he enquires. The information represents a working synthesis of the material from the sources that have been studied to date.

Gawhar Khánum

As yet, the date of the birth of Gawhar Khanum has not been determined. The marriage took place in Baghdád, around 1863. Gawhar Khánum remained with her brother in that city when Bahá'u'lláh left 'Iráq. Later on she was made captive together with other believers, among them Zaynu'l- Muqarrabín, on their way from Baghdád to Mosul and received instruction from Bahá'u'lláh to proceed to 'Akká. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this captivity in the Tablet to the Sháh. She passed away during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Genealogical Background of the Founders of the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths

53

Furúghíyyih, Gawhar Khánum's Daughter

Furúghíyyih Khánum was born in 1873. Her marriage took place in 1885/1886. While the exact date of her death is not known, in *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 319, Shoghi Effendi states

that

she passed away during the Ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Diyá’íyyih Khánúm

We have found no record of the date of birth of Diyá’íyyih Khánúm.

According to “The Spoken Chronicle of Túbá Khánúm”, reported in Lady Blomfield’s *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1967), p. 112, it would appear that Diyá’íyyih Khánúm’s marriage took place in 1895.

According to the inscription on her gravestone, she passed away in the year 1951. The exact date of her passing has not been determined.

Túbá Khánúm

According to her “Spoken Chronicle” in *The Chosen Highway*, it would appear that Túbá Khánúm was born in 1879/1880 (see pages 93 and 95). She died in 1959, this being the date inscribed on her gravestone. No information has come to light concerning the date of her marriage.

Rúhá Khánúm

The dates of the birth, marriage and death of Rúhá Khánúm have not, as yet, been determined.

Munavvar Khánúm

The dates of the birth and marriage of Munnavar Khánúm have not so far been found. However, as recorded on her gravestone, she passed away in 1971.

The Fifth Daughter of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It is thought that the daughter of the Master who passed away later in her childhood is Rúhangiz. The date of her birth is unknown. According to “The Spoken Chronicle of Túbá Khánúm” in *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 103-104, her death occurred after the passing of Bahá’u’lláh. The year inscribed on her gravestone is 1309 A.H. (i.e. 1892).

54 Australian Bahá’í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Meditation and Health

Paul Friedman

Outline

1. Prayer and Meditation: Synergistic Forces of Spiritual Transformation
2. What is Meditation According to the Bahá’í Writings?
3. Meditation as Pondering, Reflecting and Thinking Deeply
4. Meditation as Silent Wordless Reflection, Seeking Divine Wisdom
5. Meditation Using Repetition of Words or Phrases
6. Forms of Bahá’í Meditation
7. Forms of Meditation With Proven Health Effects
8. Transcendental Meditation and the Bahá’í Teachings
9. Transcendental Meditation and Health

10. Conclusions

The aims of this article are:

1. To develop a deeper understanding of the practice of meditation according to the Bahá'í Writings
2. To explore the effects of meditation on health.

Meditation has been practiced in diverse forms throughout the world for thousands of years. In an attempt to understand meditation, scientists have studied it in highly controlled settings. According to Professor Deane Shapiro, such controlled scientific experiments often remove meditation from its spiritual and religious contexts [1]. These studies can address certain aspects of

meditation such as stress reduction and relaxation but are ill-equipped to deal with broader elements.

Shapiro asserts that most published studies of meditation have examined Eastern forms meditation from Vedic or Buddhist traditions; few studies have examined meditation from Africa, North or South America [1].

There are many forms of meditation such as:

Meditation and Health

55

1. Contemplation
2. Concentration without contemplation (e.g. focus on breathing or watching a flame)
3. Mindfulness
4. Zen meditation pondering words or phrases, often paradoxical (e.g. if the Buddha stands in the way of your enlightenment kill him)
5. Visualizing or imagining certain states such as love
6. Transcendental Meditation, in which sounds without meaning are repeated to attain a state of restful alertness where the mind is silent (the effect of the sounds is linked to their resonance frequencies)
7. Meditation designed for people living a monastic life

Activities not typically considered meditation, such as immersion in natural beauty in mountains, or waterfalls may foster episodes of meditation. Many people use music to relax and in some cases meditate; the Bahá'í writings have called music a ladder for your souls to ascend to the world of spirit [Bahá'u'lláh. Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 38]. Likewise, certain activities such as

fishing may lead to periods of contemplation and reflection.

Before considering the relationship between meditation and health it is important to define health. The word health comes from the term wholeness.

The World Health Organization has defined health as the optimal state of physical and mental well-being rather than the absence of disease. According to this rigorous definition, few people are truly healthy. In this age of medical syndromes, the rarest of all syndromes has been described by a New Zealand comedian, Gary McCormack, as TNP: totally normal person!

Palliative care of people in their last months of life offers rather different definitions of health as a state of peace and acceptance of death in which symptoms such as pain and shortness of breath are controlled. In this model a person about to die can be seen as whole whereas a person with no measurable disease can be quite unhealthy and wishing she or he was dead.

I have organised this article into ten topics. For each topic I will examine pertinent references from the Bahá'í Writings and from books and articles about specific forms of meditation. I have employed Mars for Windows, a computer database of the Bahá'í Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and

Shoghi Effendi, to sample the relative frequencies and associations of terms such as meditation, contemplate, reflect and ponder. Because Mars for Windows lists certain quotations twice when they appear in different books, the absolute number of citations for a given word is not a perfect measure of the frequency of that term. The table below shows that the most frequently cited term is reflect followed by ponder and meditation. The least frequently cited term is commune. None of these key words were linked within 10 words to health or healing suggesting that the Bahá'í writings either do not or rarely connect meditative practices to health or healing.

56 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Word	Citations	Health / Healing
Reflect	253	0
Ponder	199	0
Meditation	100	0
Meditate	95	0
Contemplate	53	0
Transcend	24	0
Commune	32	0

1. Prayer and Meditation: Synergistic Forces of Spiritual Transformation

The Bahá'í Writings often associate the words prayer and meditation in the same sentence. The words meditate or meditation appear in 100 citations from Mars for Windows. In fifty one percent of these citations, the words meditate (tion) and prayer appeared within 10 words of one another; in 47% these terms were within three words of one another. Bahá'í book titles linking meditation and prayer include Prayers and Meditations and The Importance of Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude: A Compilation.

The

Bahá'í month of fasting is also a month of meditation [Kitáb-i-Aqdas Notes,

pp. 176-177].

Here are several examples of exhortations to pray and meditate:

The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life!
[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Importance of Deepening, p. 204]

For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer.

[Shoghi Effendi. Directives of the Guardian, p. 86]

Meditation and Health

57

The Guardian has thus linked prayer and meditation with communion with God. In summary, meditation is depicted as a necessary companion to prayer in the journey of spiritual transformation. The Bahá'í Teachings also link study with prayer and meditation: ‘These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God...’

[Shoghi Effendi. The Importance of Deepening, p. 232]

Bahá'u'lláh has emphasized the link between worship and bliss:

‘Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an

act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world’

[The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting, p. 5].

Dr Hossain Danesh, a Bahá'í psychiatrist and academic, has explained that:

While meditation is directly connected with our capacity to know, prayer is indispensable to our capacity to love. Through prayer we commune with the ultimate object of our love. Prayer is love talk. The lover earnestly supplicates the Beloved, humbly entreating the loved one to shower her or him with loving bounties. In the context of spiritual transformation, the loved one is God - the source of all truth, love, and assistance. Therefore when we pray we enkindle our soul, open our heart and mind, attract the hearts of other people, and help to create a reciprocal relationship of love, truth and service.

[Danesh. The Psychology of Spirituality. From Divided Self to Integrated Self p. 230]

2. What is Meditation According to the Bahá'í Writings?

Perhaps the best explanation of meditation within the Bahá'í Writings is in a passage from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that appears in Paris Talks. Because the meaning

of this passage is so concentrated, I will analyse it sentence by sentence. To begin, 'Abdu'l-Bahá cites Bahá'u'lláh stating that contemplation is essential

for understanding and that this process requires the meditator to remain silent:

'Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of

the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because

it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time - he cannot both speak and meditate' [Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 174].

The word contemplate was cited 53 times in Mars for Windows but never in association with meditate or meditation.

Next, 'Abdu'l-Bahá depicts meditation as speaking with your own spirit - asking questions and receiving answers:

58 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

'It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed'

[Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 174].

'Abdu'l-Bahá labels meditation as an essential feature distinguishing humans from animals:

'You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts' [Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 175].

'Abdu'l-Bahá assures us that God bestows the breath of the Holy Spirit during meditation:

'Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit - the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation'

[Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 175].

He further asserts that we are inspired, strengthened and informed of new wisdom during meditation, receiving spiritual nutrition:

'The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food'

[Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 175].

'Abdu'l-Bahá assures us that we can unlock the doors of mysteries during meditation:

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of

man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 175]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasizes the importance of meditation to advancing science, art and civilization:

Meditation and Health

59

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God. This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 175]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá enjoins us to direct the mirror of meditation towards spiritual matters and issues that benefit humanity:

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed. The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these. But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained. Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed - turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects - so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Paris Talks, pp. 175-176]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to prayers that ‘transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds ...’ [Bahá’í Prayers (US edition), pp. 70-71]:

Adorn our bodies with the robe of Thy bounty, and remove from our eyes the veil of sinfulness, and give us the chalice of Thy grace; that the essence of all beings may sing Thy praise before the vision of Thy grandeur. Reveal then Thyself, O Lord, by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls - a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds - that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Bahá’í Prayers (US edition), pp. 70-71]

Might such prayers not represent a meditation that leaves the plane of thinking and travels towards the absolute Being?

I propose that Bahá’í meditation comprises three or more distinct processes:

60

Australian Bahá’í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

1. Contemplation or thinking in a conscious state.

In this paper I will use the term contemplation to refer to this process. An example is reading the Writings and pondering the meaning using logic or intuition.

2. Silent wordless reflection, seeking Divine wisdom

In this paper I will use the term wordless reflection to denote this process.

3. Reflection on repeated words or phrases

An example is repeating the Greatest Name [Allah-u-Abhá] ninety-five times.

In this article I will use the term reflection on words to refer to this process.

3. Meditation as Pondering, Reflecting and Thinking Deeply

There are a number of passages in the Bahá’í Writings which depict meditation as pondering, reflecting and thinking deeply as opposed to a process which goes beyond or transcends formal thinking. Bahá’u’lláh enjoined meditation for a thousand years:

‘It is necessary for them to meditate, to meditate for a thousand thousand years, that haply they may attain unto a sprinkling from the ocean of knowledge, and discover the things whereof they are oblivious in this day.’
[Bahá’u’lláh. Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 126-127]

He particularly emphasized pondering the Divine verses:

Do thou meditate on that which We have revealed unto thee, that thou mayest discover the purpose of God, thy Lord, and the Lord of all worlds.
[Bahá’u’lláh. Gleanings, p. 153]

Meditate profoundly, that the secret of things unseen may be revealed unto you, that you may inhale the sweetness of a spiritual and imperishable fragrance, and that you may acknowledge the truth that from time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns.

[Bahá’u’lláh. The Kitáb-i-Iqan, p. 8]

Meditate on the world and the state of its people.

[Bahá’u’lláh. Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 56]

Bahá’u’lláh has assured us that meditation, like reflection, is a highly

condensed form of worship:

Meditation and Health

61

‘...the meditation referred to in the words “One hour’s reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship” must needs be observed...’
[Bahá’u’lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Iqan*, p. 238].

Shoghi Effendi has assured us that meditation would confer Divine inspiration; I cannot determine whether the Guardian was referring to contemplation or another type of meditation in this passage.

The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine. God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so. We cannot clearly distinguish between personal desire and guidance, but if the way opens, when we have sought guidance, then we may presume God is helping us.
[Shoghi Effendi. *Directives of the Guardian*, pp. 77-78]

Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have linked the words meditate and ponder in a number of passages: Referring to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*,
Bahá’u’lláh

enjoined his followers to peruse, meditate and ponder the Most Holy Book: ‘Blessed those who peruse it! Blessed those who apprehend it! Blessed those who meditate upon it! Blessed those who ponder its meaning!’
[Bahá’u’lláh.

Kitáb-i-Aqdas Other Sections, p. 16]. The separate instructions suggest a hierarchy from peruse (survey in superficial study) to apprehend (logical study)

and meditate (seeking Divine inspiration).

In other passages, ponder and meditate have been linked:

The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching.

[Bahá’u’lláh. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 200]

It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words, and humbly to call upon Him, and to put away self in His heavenly Cause.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 241)

The words ponder and reflect are often linked in the Bahá’í Writings:

Ponder and reflect how mighty and potent hath the Cause of God become!

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections* p. 99]

O SON OF MAN! Ponder and reflect. Is it thy wish to die upon thy bed, or to shed thy life-blood on the dust, a martyr in My path, and so

62

Australian Bahá’í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

become the manifestation of My command and the revealer of My light in

the highest paradise? Judge thou aright, O servant!

[Bahá'u'lláh. Arabic Hidden Words, p. 46]

Pondering can release extraordinary power. In the Fire Tablet, the Blessed Beauty advised us: 'Should all the servants read and ponder this, there shall be kindled in their veins a fire that shall set aflame the worlds'

[Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'í Prayers (US), p. 221]. Thus, reading the Fire Tablet is only one step

in the process of enkindlement - pondering is also necessary. Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Do thou ponder on the penetrative influence of the Word of God'

[Bahá'u'lláh. Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 75-76]

"Blessed the man", He, moreover, has stated, "who will read it, [the Kitáb-i-Aqdas] and ponder the verses sent down in it by God, the Lord of Power, the Almighty.

[Bahá'u'lláh. Kitáb-i-Aqdas Other Sections, p. 16]

In more than one passage Bahá'u'lláh asks his followers to ponder with their hearts:

Ponder this in thine heart, that the truth may be revealed unto thee, and be thou steadfast in His path.

[Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings, p. 76].

Ponder this in your hearts, O people of Bahá, and render thanks unto your Lord, the Expounder, the Most Manifest.

[Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings, p. 117]

Ponder this in your hearts, O people, and be not of those who have turned a deaf ear to the admonitions of Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Praised.

[Bahá'u'lláh. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 13]

We are also enjoined to ponder with our inner and outer eyes. Outer vision is essential for most of our daily activities. How much more important is inner vision to our spiritual development:

Ponder a while thereon, that with both your inner and outer eye, ye may perceive the subtleties of Divine wisdom and discover the gems of heavenly knowledge...

[Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings, p. 144]

Meditation and Health

63

O My Brother! Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never come to the Joseph of the Beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being; and until thou burn with the fire of love, thou shalt never commune with the Lover of Longing.

[Bahá'u'lláh. Seven Valleys and Four Valleys, p. 9]

What is our inner and outer eye? Could the inner eye refer to a state of detachment with our minds focused on or opened towards God in wordless reflection? Bahá'u'lláh writes, 'O MAN OF TWO VISIONS! Close one eye and open the other. Close one to the world and all that is therein, and open the other to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved' [Bahá'u'lláh. Persian Hidden Words, p. 12].

Thus, meditation may be compared to opening our spiritual eye to become more conscious of the perfection of God and less aware of the imperfections of the world.

Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined His followers to reflect on the Teachings:

Reflect: Who in this world is able to manifest such transcendent power, such pervading influence?

[Bahá'u'lláh. Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 235]

This subject needs deep thought. Then the cause of these changes will be evident and apparent. Blessed are those who reflect!

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá. Some Answered Questions, p. 96)

Study groups in the Ruhi institute collectively reflect on the teachings:

The posture of learning avoids searching for formulas that are to be followed strictly. Decisions are carried out, after consultation, with the understanding that the developments which follow will be observed and reflected upon. This community reflection is done in light of the wisdom enshrined in the Writings.

[Institute Training Programs, June 1995]

In the Ridván 157 Message of April 2000 the Universal House of Justice enjoined the Bahá'ís to meditate on the sacred word. This passage is most likely referring to conscious contemplation of the Writings: '...members of our worldwide community also gave more attention to drawing on the power of prayer, to meditating on the sacred Word, and to deriving the spiritual benefits of participation in devotional gatherings' [Ridván 157 Message, p. 3].

64

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Bahá'u'lláh enjoined His followers to '...Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning...' (Bahá'u'lláh. Arabic Hidden

Words, p. 31). Contemplation and reflection is a suitable process of reviewing each day and correcting our behaviour.

4. Meditation as Silent Wordless Reflection, Seeking Divine Wisdom

In the Book of the River, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that experience and observation is necessary to understanding - logic is not sufficient:

...human reason is not a sufficient standard. When viewed with the eye of insight, no phenomenon on earth could be comprehended by any human, whether high or low, without prior observation and experience. Observe the sun in the heavens... Certainly, human reason would not be inclined to accept the possibility of the existence of such a thing by means of any rational definition or description without actual observation and experience.

[Sahifiy-i-Shattiyyih (Book of the River) Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. A Provisional Translation. By Nader Saiedi. Journal of Bahá'í Studies 1999; 9:3, p. 57]

Nader Saiedi concludes that: 'After actual observation and experience, reason takes for granted all the wonders of natural phenomena and reduces them to necessary rational truths capable of deduction through rational analysis' [Concealment and Revelation in Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the River. Journal of Bahá'í Studies 1999; 9:3, p. 301].

These passages from the Book of the River have particular relevance to the Bahá'í approach to meditation. If meditation is a direct communication channel with God, then it can provide the experience of knowing God, which is far more important than knowing about God. This experience of knowing God is not and cannot be put into words.

Reflection without words may follow periods of prayer, communion with God or study of the Writings. Just as prayer can be viewed as speaking to God, reflection without words may represent listening to God or communing without the constraints of language.

Various passages in the Writings refer to entering the Divine Presence and being immersed in the love and bounties of God: '...the people of Bahá have entered the blissful abode of the Divine Presence, and quaffed the wine of reunion, from the chalice of the beauty of their Lord, the All-Possessing, the Most High' (Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings, p. 32).

Meditation and Health

65

5. Meditation Using Repetition of Words or Phrases

As mentioned above, Bahá'ís repeat the Greatest Name, [Allah-u-Abhá], ninety-five times per day. When believers repeat the Greatest Name they are using a phrase with meaning as opposed to a mantra, which is a sound without meaning. The mantra in Transcendental Meditation is used to settle the mind in a deep state of restful alertness, at which time the meditator passively lets go of the mantra. If one persists repeating the sound after one starts to transcend, then the mind is drawn back to the intellectual level and out of transcendence. The repetition of the Greatest Name is different from repeating a mantra until a state of transcendence is reached. However, Jan Dietrick has suggested that 'the Greatest Name is so transcendental in its meaning that it can support the mind to transcend its meaning' [personal communication]. She recommends that during repetition of the Greatest Name one should 'slow down and turn inward to the Self between words' [personal

communication].

There are a number of Bahá'í prayers which use repetition in a manner that fosters meditation. One of the prayers for the Fast re-affirms our spiritual

lifeline fourteen times, reminding us that we are: '...clinging to the hem of the

cord to which has clung all in this world and in the world to come'

[Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í Prayers US Edition pp. 238-245]. Each verse of the

Tablet of the Holy Mariner except for the last three ends with the phrase

'Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!' [Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í

Prayers US

Edition pp. 220-229]. The long prayer for the departed includes nineteen

repetitions of six separate phrases, emphasizing each as a separate meditation on the greatness of God.

6. Forms of Bahá'í Meditation

The Guardian stated that there is no set form of Bahá'í meditation -

believers may choose whichever forms suit them: 'As to meditation: This

also is a field in which the individual is free. There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan as such, for inner development.

The friends are urged - nay enjoined - to pray, and they also should meditate,

but the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual'

[Shoghi

Effendi. Directives of the Guardian, p. 35].

Bahá'ís are not to teach specific methods of meditation at Bahá'í

summer

school because this could be divisive and the Faith does not endorse one method over another method:

There are, of course, other things that one can do to increase one's

spirituality. For example, Bahá'u'lláh has specified no procedures to be

followed in meditation, and individual believers are free to do as they

wish in this area, provided that they remain in harmony with the teachings,

66

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

but such activities are purely personal and should under no circumstances

be confused with those actions which Bahá'u'lláh Himself considered to

be of fundamental importance for our spiritual growth. Some believers

may find that it is beneficial to them to follow a particular method of

meditation, and they may certainly do so, but such methods should not be

taught at Bahá'í Summer Schools or be carried out during a session of

the School because, while they may appeal to some people, they may repel

others. They have nothing to do with the Faith and should be kept quite

separate so that enquirers will not be confused.

[Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National

Spiritual Assembly, September 1, 1983) Lights of Guidance, p. 542]

The Guardian affirmed that meditation connects us with God: ‘Through meditation doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Bahá’í he is connected with the Source... Meditation is very important, and the Guardian sees no reason why the friends should not be taught to meditate, but they should guard against superstitions or foolish ideas creeping into it’ [Shoghi Effendi. Directives of the Guardian, p. 47].

Meditation, like prayer, should be linked with action and bear fruit: ‘Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential’ [Shoghi Effendi.

Lights

of Guidance, p. 457]. Prayer and meditation are the prelude for action, particularly service. Shoghi Effendi has indicated that we act in cycles, with periods of reflection and meditation followed by periods of action and service, precluding a monastic existence:

Dear friends, this is the day of faithfulness; this is the day of unity; this is the day of service. Let us not wait, nor ponder, but, detached from the world and its concerns, clad in the armour of faith, filled with the divine spirit of love, and quickened by His life-giving exhortations, let us arise in utmost love and harmony, hasten to the field of service, and subdue the domain of hearts with the arms of the love of God and the sword of peace and brotherhood.

[Shoghi Effendi. Bahiyyih Khanum, p. 164]

7. Forms of Meditation With Proven Health Effects

Bahá’í Writings either do not or rarely directly link meditation with health

or healing. As mentioned previously, the Mars for Windows database contains no sentences in which the words meditate, meditation, ponder, reflect, or contemplate includes the words health or healing. The absence of such links, however, do not prove that the Bahá’í Teachings do not connect the Meditation and Health

67

two subjects. In fact, the Writings advise us to study health and treatment of disease.

Let them also study whatever will nurture the health of the body and its physical soundness, and how to guard their children from disease. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Selections, p. 124]

Thou shouldst endeavour to study the science of medicine. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Health and Healing, p. 461]

Individual Bahá’ís are encouraged to compare the Writings to scientific knowledge. Thus the admonitions to refrain from smoking and drinking alcohol would be reinforced by scientific studies demonstrating the harmful health effects of smoking and alcohol abuse.

Although health is not the primary purpose of Bahá'í meditation, meditation could have as a secondary purpose the goal of health improvement. For example, although we regard the 'procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage' [Shoghi Effendi. World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,

p. 188] there are many other important purposes of marriage. In the Tablet to a Physician, Bahá'u'lláh warns that 'anger burneth the liver.' If anger is

harmful to health, then it follows that measures that prevent or control anger can protect against the damage from anger. Meditation and other forms of relaxation can dissipate anger and may indirectly improve health conditions influenced by anger. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá assures us that communion with God attracts a power to understand the secrets of the universe, which presumably include secrets about our health and well-being:

...if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe...

['Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'í World Faith, p. 369]

'Abdu'l-Bahá enjoins us to focus our attention or ponder the Divine teachings: 'Now, if thou wishest to know the true remedy which will heal man from

all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is

the precepts and teachings of God. Focus thine attention upon them'

['Abdu'l-Bahá. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 152].

Evaluation of the health effects of the meditation of Bahá'ís would be extraordinarily difficult given that the practice is completely individualized

68

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

and unique for each person. It may however be possible to examine the health effects of elements of Bahá'í prayer or meditation such as recitation of the

Greatest Name ninety-five times.

The form of meditation that has been most widely studied with respect to health and healing is Transcendental Meditation.

8. Transcendental Meditation and the Bahá'í Teachings

Transcendental Meditation, often labelled TM, is the most widely researched form of meditation. TM claims to create a state of restful alertness different to that of waking, dreaming or sleeping without dreaming. TM involves repetition of a sound without meaning for twenty minutes twice daily, in the morning and late afternoon or early evening. This sound is used

to quieten the mind; once in a state of quietness the meditator does not consciously repeat the sound.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a physicist by training, developed TM after studying Vedic scriptures under a spiritual master. Although Maharishi did not originate TM, he made it accessible for Westerners and helped to establish its scientific basis. He remains the central figure in TM.

About one-third of TM research has studied an advanced technique known as the TM-Sidhi program. Outcomes of conventional TM must be analysed separately from the outcomes of the TM-Sidhi program in the same way that an exercise group doing a 15 minute light warmup four times per week would be analysed separately from another group running 10 km four times per week after a 15 minute light warmup.

The basis of TM shares much in common with the Bahá'í teachings. In the following list, numbers in square brackets refer to the page number from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *The Science of Being and the Art of Living*.

Transcendental Meditation:

1. One almighty God
2. All religions come from the same Absolute Being
3. Meditation is essential
4. Live a life of service to others
5. Individuals responsible for their own spiritual progress
6. World government to bring world peace
7. Spiritual basis for solving economic problems
8. Obey the government and abide by law of the land [166]
9. Moderation in all things [170, 225]
10. Alcohol is harmful and should be avoided [117, 162, 291]
11. Follow the scriptures of your own Faith [132]
12. Unity in diversity. [351]
13. A set of natural laws underpin the universe [323]

Meditation and Health

69

Some teachings of Maharishi contradict those of the Bahá'í Writings, such as:

1. Follow Your Own Religion - do not look to other Faiths [131-132]
2. Reincarnation [110]
3. Behave naturally, do not plan or ponder how to behave [112]
4. The 'Bhagavad-Gita is the highest divine wisdom ever revealed to man...' [321]
5. Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation Movement, continuing in the world, will create an ideal civilization. [author not stated p. 333]
6. No reference to the Bahá'í Faith in TM literature

These teachings, however, do not relate to the practice of TM. Hence the practice of TM does not conflict with Bahá'í principles.

TM proponents are permitted to earn money through the teaching and application of TM in publishing, health spas and other areas whereas

Bahá'ís

do not as a general rule earn money from teaching or applying the Bahá'í teachings.

The Bahá'í Writings praise the word transcendental: 'No one except Thyself can unravel the secret of Thy nature, and naught else but Thy transcendental Essence can grasp the reality of Thy unsearchable being' [Bahá'u'lláh.

Gleanings, p. 64]. Shoghi Effendi has labelled Bahá'u'lláh as transcendental: 'Dominating the entire range of this fascinating spectacle towers the incomparable figure of Bahá'u'lláh, transcendental in His majesty, serene, awe-inspiring, unapproachably glorious' [World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 97]

The Bahá'í Writings further depict a set of universal laws similar to Natural Law in TM:

This Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart - to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization and are under one law from which they will never depart. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Some Answered Questions, p. 3]

It is said that Nature in its own essence is in the grasp of the power of God, Who is the Eternal Almighty One: He holds Nature within accurate regulations and laws, and rules over it.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Some Answered Questions, p. 4]

70 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred to natural law in at least three passages:

The world of creation is bound by natural law, finite and mortal. [‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Paris Talks, p. 57]

The phenomenal world is entirely subject to the rule and control of natural law.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 17]

Man is not the captive of nature, for although according to natural law he is a being of the earth, yet he guides ships over the ocean, flies through the air in airplanes, descends in submarines; therefore, he has overcome natural law and made it subservient to his wishes.

[‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 17]

Maharishi describes natural law somewhat differently than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. According to Maharishi, natural law cannot be overcome or made subservient.

I will now compare features of meditation mentioned in the Bahá'í Writings to the practice of Transcendental Meditation:

1. Contemplate in silence (do not speak while meditating)
2. Speak with your own spirit
3. Ask questions of the spirit and receive answers
4. Meditation unlocks the doors of mysteries
5. Meditation informs and strengthens the spirit
6. Meditation is like a mirror which should be turned towards spiritual, scientific and artistic themes that benefit humanity
7. Meditation as prayer that transcends the murmur of syllables and sounds
8. Meditation should generate action
9. Prayerful meditation on the Bahá'í Teachings, particularly meditations written by Bahá'u'lláh

Starting with the first feature, Transcendental Meditation is practiced in silence:

...sanctuaries of silence be constructed in the midst of noisy marketplaces of big cities, before going to their businesses, and after completing their businesses of the day, may enter into silent meditation rooms, dive deep within themselves, and be profited by undisturbed, regular, and deep meditations... it seems necessary that such silent meditation centers also be constructed in the holiday resorts where people go on weekends to stay for one or two days.

[Maharishi p. 300]

Meditation and Health

71

Maharishi regards contemplation as an intellectual path towards God consciousness, different from TM:

... the intellectual path of God realization through contemplation is not a path for practical men...No man remaining active in the world...can possibly succeed in infusing the divine nature into his mind through this method of contemplation. The intellectual path of divine revelation suits those who have nothing to do with practical life... The silence which a recluse enjoys is such that it keeps him away from work. He is in silence most of the time...

[Maharishi p. 282]

Although TM is not portrayed as contemplation, Maharishi does not oppose contemplation as an adjunct to meditation. TM is a specific form of meditation whereas the Bahá'í Writings define meditation more broadly. The second feature of Bahá'í meditation, speaking with your own spirit, is not a phrase used by Maharishi, who depicts TM as communication with the Absolute. TM refers to this process as returning to the Absolute Self. The third feature of Bahá'í meditation, asking questions of the spirit and receiving answers, is likewise not a phrase used by Maharishi. He refers to this phenomenon as creative intelligence, in which the meditator receives inspiration from the Absolute to gain unlimited imagination, energy and joy:

Because absolute Being is the source of all thought and of all creation, when the conscious mind comes to that level, it comes in contact with the unlimited creative intelligence of absolute Being. Great creative intelligence enters into the nature of the mind; constructive imagination, the power of creative thinking, increases along with joyfulness and contentment. The mind coming in tune with the field of Being gains the source of unlimited energy. Such a powerful, energetic mind naturally has very powerful thoughts.

[Maharishi, p. 116]

The fourth feature of Bahá'í meditation, unlocking the doors of mysteries, is related to the creative intelligence released by TM as previously described. The fifth feature of Bahá'í meditation, that meditation informs and strengthens the spirit, is consistent with the writings of Maharishi on TM and creative intelligence. The elimination of stress in the mind and body while practicing TM strengthens the mind and body as well as spirit and can empower an easier pursuit of a devotional life.

The sixth feature of Bahá'í meditation is that meditation is like a mirror which should be turned towards spiritual, scientific and artistic themes that

72

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

benefit humanity. Maharishi's writings support this view of using meditation; after meditation the mind is more open to right thought which will in turn create right action.

The seventh feature of Bahá'í meditation, in which meditation is viewed as prayer that transcends the murmur of syllables and sounds, is consistent with TM, which does not employ words with meaning to achieve a state of higher consciousness.

The eighth feature of Bahá'í meditation, that meditation should generate action, is consistent with TM. Maharishi has explained the unique role of meditation in creating right action:

A right thought will be that which will produce a good, harmonious, useful and life-supporting influence for the doer and for the entire universe in the present and for all times... It does not seem possible to entertain thoughts which are always right by trying to think rightly. Any conscious attempt on the part of the mind to entertain only right thoughts will only mean straining the mind on a plane over which there can be no control. In order that the mind succeed in entertaining only right thoughts, it should be cultured so that by nature it picks up only a right thought.

[Maharishi p. 140]

The ninth feature of Bahá'í meditation, prayerful meditation on the Bahá'í

Teachings, particularly meditations written by Bahá'u'lláh, would be regarded

by TM as contemplation rather than meditation.

9. Transcendental Meditation and Health

TM is associated with health promotion, disease prevention and improved health status. A large number of scientific studies have been published in refereed medical and scientific journals to support the role of TM and the TM-Sidhi in prevention and treatment of disease and risk factors for disease. Less than one-quarter of the studies randomized subjects to either TM or a control method, in part because it is difficult to gain adherence to a life-style

change not selected by the participants. By comparison, it is very easy to randomise subjects to take a tablet once daily that might contain an active treatment or a placebo.

Review of these studies [3-29 below] indicates that:

1. TM reduces risk factors for vascular disease and dementia such as blood pressure, serum cholesterol, smoking and anxiety [7, 8, 21, 24, 25, 28]
2. TM practice may virtually eradicate essential hypertension, the most common form of high blood pressure [10, 13, 21, 22]
3. TM prevents all forms of stroke based on its effects on blood pressure, smoking and prevention of heart disease [7]
4. TM reduces symptoms of many conditions such as angina [5], headache, pain [25] and asthma [29]
5. TM reduces the rate of hospital admission by 50% in North America [9] We cannot extrapolate this finding to Australia or New Zealand
6. TM reduces hospital admissions in all categories except childbirth [9]
7. TM improves cognitive performance [18, 23]
8. TM reduces biological aging as measured by DHEA-S levels, systolic blood pressure, visual and auditory thresholds and intellectual performance [3, 4, 15, 27]
9. TM improves psychological health and stress hardiness [6, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20]

These studies suggest that the benefits of TM are cumulative: groups practicing for five years have greater benefit than novices while those practicing for ten years have greater benefit than those practicing for five years.

10. Conclusions

According to the Bahá'í Writings, meditation is essential for our spiritual growth. The regular practice of meditation is exalted to the level of prayer and fasting. The Bahá'í Writings also encourage natural preventative practices to maintain health and thereby serve mankind. Bahá'ís are required to seek competent physicians when they are ill and follow the physician's instructions. A growing number of health practitioners are recommending TM for preventative and curative health benefits. Bahá'ís consider learning TM as part of their health.

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserted that the meditator must observe silence. Meditation

should generate action such as service. There is no set form of Bahá'í meditation. Therefore individuals are free to choose processes that enhance their spiritual development. There are at least three processes involved in meditation: 1) contemplation or thinking in a conscious state, as exemplified by reflecting on the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh or calling ourselves to account

each day; 2) wordless reflection in an altered state of consciousness, as suggested by prayer that 'transcends the murmur of syllables and sounds.'

TM

qualifies as one such meditative practice; 3) repetition of words and phrases such as the Greatest Name. These words and phrases may be separated by periods of contemplation or wordless reflection.

Scientific evidence on the health benefits of Transcendental Meditation is quite strong. Further research is needed to identify health benefits from other forms of meditation and to assess the effects of different forms of meditation on the well-being and health of Bahá'ís.

74

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Acknowledgements

The author deeply appreciates the constructive remarks from Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei, Jan Dietrick and Ron Whitehurst on the draft paper presented at the Australian Association for Bahá'í Studies Conference in October 2000.

Bahá'í References

'Abdu'l-Baha. The Importance of Deepening. In Compilation of Compilations. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Sydney, 1991.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. Paris Talks. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, London, 1972.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. Promulgation of Universal Peace. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1982.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Bahá'í World

Centre, Haifa, 1982.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. Some Answered Questions. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1990.

Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Bahá'í Prayers (US edition), Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1985.

Bahá'u'lláh. Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1988.

Bahá'u'lláh. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1990.

Bahá'u'lláh. Hidden Words. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1985.

Bahá'u'lláh. Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, 1992.

- Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1989.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Prayers and Meditations*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1987.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Seven Valleys and Four Valleys*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1991.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1988.
- Danesh, Hossain B. *The Psychology of Spirituality. From Divided Self to Integrated Self*. Landegg Academy Press, 1977.
- Effendi, Shoghi. *Bahíyyih Khánúm*. Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, 1982.
- Effendi, Shoghi. *Directives of the Guardian*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, 1973.
- Effendi, Shoghi. *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1991.
- The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting. Selection of Extracts and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*. Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, 2000.
- Multiple authors. *Lights of Guidance*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Delhi, 1994.

- Saiedi, Nader. *Sahifiy-i-Shattiyyih (Book of the River) Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. A Provisional Translation*. *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 1999; 9 (number 3): page 57-61.
- Saiedi, Nader. *Concealment and Revelation in Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the River*. *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 1999; 9 (number 3):25-56.

References to Transcendental Meditation

1. Shapiro, Deane. *Examining the content and challenge of meditation: A challenge for psychology in the areas of stress management, psychotherapy, and religion / values*. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 1994; 34: 101-
2. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1963) *The Science of Being and the Art of Living*. Transcendental Meditation. New York: Signet.
3. Wallace RK, Dillbeck MC, Jacobe E, Harrington B. *The effects of the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program on the aging process*. *International Journal of Neuroscience* 1982; 16: 53-58
4. Alexander CN, Langer EJ, Newman RI, Chandler HM, Davies JL. *Transcendental Meditation, mindfulness and longevity: an experimental study with the elderly*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1989 Dec; 57(6): 950-64
5. Zamarra JE, Schneider RH, Besseghini I, Robinson DK, Salerno JW. *Usefulness of the Transcendental Meditation program in the treatment of patients with coronary artery disease*. *American Journal of Cardiology* 1996; 77: 867-870

6. Gaylord C, Orme-Johnson D, Travis F. The effects of the Transcendental Meditation technique and progressive muscle relaxation on EEG coherence, stress reactivity and mental health in black adults. *International Journal of Neuroscience* 1989 May; 46(1-2): 77-86
7. Castillo-Richmond A, Schneider Robert H, Alexander CN, Cook R, Myers H, Nidich S, Haney C, Rainforth M, Salerno J. Effects of stress reduction on carotid atherosclerosis in hypertensive African Americans. *Stroke* 2000; 31: 568-573
8. Alexander CN, Robinson P, Orme-Johnson DW et al. Effects of Transcendental Meditation compared to other methods of relaxation and meditation in reducing risk factors, morbidity and mortality. *Homeostasis* 1994; 35: 243-264
9. Orme-Johnson D. Medical care utilization and the Transcendental Meditation program. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1987; 49: 493-507
10. Wenneberg SE, Schneider RH, Walton KG, MacClean CRK, Levitsky DK, Salerno JW, Wallace RK. A controlled study of the effects of the Transcendental Meditation program on cardiovascular reactivity and ambulatory blood pressure. *International Journal of Neuroscience* 1997 Jan; 89 (1-2): 15-28
11. Electrophysiological correlates of higher states of consciousness during sleep in long-term practitioners of the Transcendental Meditation program. Mason LI, Alexander CN, Travis FT, Marsh G, Orme-Johnson DW, Gackenbach J, Mason DC, Rainforth M, Walton KG. *Sleep* 1997 Feb; 20(2): 102-110
12. Jevening R, Wilson AF, Davidson JM. Adrenocortical activity during meditation. *Hormones Behaviour* 1978;10: 54-69
13. Seer P, Raeburn JM. Meditation training and essential hypertension: a methodological study. *Journal of Behavioural Medicine* 1980 March; 3(1): 59-71
14. Warrenburg S, Pagano RR, Woods M, Hlastala M. A comparison of somatic relaxation and EEG activity in classical progressive relaxation and Transcendental Meditation. *Journal of Behavioural Medicine* 1980 March; 3(1): 73-93
15. Glaser JL, Brind JL, Vogelmann JH, Eisner MJ, Dillbeck MC, Wallace RK, Chopra D, Orentreich N. Elevated serum dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate levels in practitioners of the Transcendental Meditation program. *Journal of Behavioural Medicine* 1992 Aug; 15(4): 327-341
16. Dillbeck MC. The effect of the TM technique on anxiety level. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 1977;33: 1076-78
17. Throll DA. Transcendental Meditation and progressive relaxation: their physiological effects. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 1982 Jul;38(2): 522-528
18. Jedrczak A, Toomey M, Clements G. The TM-Sidhi programme, age and brief tests of perceptual-motor speed and nonverbal intelligence. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 1986 Jan;42(1): 161-164

19. Gelderloos P, Hermans HJ, Ahlscrom HH, Jacoby R. Transcendence and psychological health: studies with long-term participants of the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program. *Journal of Psychology* 1990 March;124(2): 177-197
20. Alexander C, Rainforth M, Gelderloos P. Transcendental Meditation, selfactualization and psychological health: A conceptual overview and statistical analysis. *Journal of Social Behaviour and Personality* 1991;6(5): 189-247
21. Wallace RK, Silver J, Mills PJ, Dillbeck MC, Wagoner DE. Systolic blood pressure and long-term practice of the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi Program: Effects of TM on systolic blood pressure. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1983;45: 41-46
22. Barnes VA, Treiber FA, Turner JR, David H, Strong WB. Acute effects of Transcendental Meditation on hemodynamic functioning in middle-aged
Meditation and Health 77

adults. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1999;61: 525-531

23. Pelletier KR. Influence of Transcendental Meditation upon autokinetic perception. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 1974;39:1031-1034
24. Jevning R, Anand R, Biedebach M, Fernando G. Effects on regional cerebral blood flow of Transcendental Meditation. *Physiology and Behaviour* 1996 March;59(3): 399-402
25. Orme-Johnson DW. Autonomic stability and Transcendental Meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1973;35:341-349
26. Mills W, Farrow JT. The Transcendental Meditation technique and acute experimental pain. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1981 April;43(2): 157-164
27. Werner OR, Wallace RK, Charles B, Janssen G, Stryker T, Chalmers RA. Long-term endocrinologic changes in subjects practising the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1986 January;48(1-2): 59-66
28. Schneider RH, Nidich SI, Salerno JW, et al. Lower lipid peroxide levels in practitioners of the Transcendental Meditation program. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 1998 Jan-Feb;60(1): 38-41
29. Wilson AF, Hornsberger R, Chiu JT, Novey HS. Transcendental Meditation and asthma. *Respiration* 1974;32: 74-80

78

Australian Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Maharishi Ayurveda

A Bahá'í Exploration*

Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei

Abstract

Ayurveda is the traditional health system of India. Maharishi Ayurveda is the restoration of Ayurveda in a system adapted for universal application in the modern world. This article explores the parallels between the Bahá'í writings on health and healing, and the principles of Maharishi Ayurveda. After an introduction to Ayurveda, the article provides a comparative assessment

of the understanding of homeostasis, pathogeny, and the mind-body relationship. It then outlines some of the therapeutic strategies of Maharishi Ayurveda and examines how they correspond to the Bahá'í writings on healing. The article does not purport to be a comprehensive discourse on Maharishi Ayurveda. It is, rather, a layperson's brief exploration from a Bahá'í perspective. It is neither attempted nor indeed possible to include all the pertinent Bahá'í writings, as they are voluminous and transcend the scope of this article.

The world of being shineth, in this Day, with the resplendency of this Divine Revelation. All created things extol its saving grace, and sing its praises. The universe is wrapt in an ecstasy of joy and gladness. The Scriptures of past Dispensations celebrate the great Jubilee that must needs greet this most great Day of God. (Bahá'u'lláh)

* This article was originally published in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 4.3.1991. Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint the article by the Association for Bahá'í Studies (North America) and to reprint excerpts from *Perfect Health* by Deepak Chopra, © 1990 Deepak Chopra. Reprinted by permission of Harmony Books, a division of Crown Publishers, Inc. This presentation of Maharishi Ayurveda primarily aims to show the close relation of the theoretical framework of Maharishi Ayurveda to the Bahá'í writings. The article does not advocate Maharishi Ayurveda as a Bahá'í medicine. Neither does it advocate Transcendental Meditation as a Bahá'í technique. While the author practises the Maharishi Ayurveda regimen, she does not have any commercial interest in Maharishi Ayurveda or any formal affiliation with its organizations.

Note from the Editor of *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*: Readers of this article are asked to take note of the following quotation from the Bahá'í writings: "No specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with the Bahá'í teachings. What we have are certain guidelines, indications and principles which will be carefully studied by experts and will, in the years ahead, undoubtedly prove to be invaluable sources of guidance and inspiration in the development of these medical sciences" (from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Lights of Guidance* 297).

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá'í Exploration

79

Ayurveda is a science to maintain perfect health.¹ It is an integral part of the Vedic literature, the world's most ancient divine scriptures still extant.

Two of the most important Ayurvedic texts are Caraka Samhita, a treatise on

general medicine, and Sushruta Samhita, a classic text on surgery. Ayurvedic medicine has been practised in India for thousands of years. It became fragmented when India was occupied by foreign nations. (Consequently, the current poor levels of health in India can provide no measure of its effectiveness.) Ayurveda is a comprehensive and preventive system of health care. It

has application in surgery, gynaecology, ophthalmology, paediatrics, obstetrics, toxicology, internal medicine, and many other fields of medicine. Maharishi Ayurveda is the reconstruction of the original completeness of Ayurveda

by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi² in collaboration with many of the world's greatest Ayurvedic scholars and physicians.³

Background

The ancient rishis (seers) identified the source of all life as consciousness—that essential unity which animates all existence. By interacting with

itself (Purusha, the eternal unmanifest reality, in conjunction with Prakriti, (likewise eternal, unmanifest, but assuming a creative function) consciousness unfolds, manifesting itself in all the various expressions of nature (Sushruta Samhita 2: 114-17). Bahá'u'lláh affirms that all existence originates from one unified divine principle:

The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different. (Tablets 140)

In the Lawh-i-Ayy-i-Núr (Tablet of the Verse of Light), Bahá'u'lláh expounds on this theme:

Know that the first tokens that emanated from the pre-existent Cause in the worlds of creation are the four elements: fire, air, water, and earth.... Then the natures (ustuqusát) of these four appeared: heat, moisture, cold, and dryness—those same qualities that ye both reckon and know. When the elements interacted and joined with one another, two pillars became evident for each one: for fire, heat and dryness, and likewise for the remaining three in accordance with these rules, as ye are aware. By them God created all that there is in the worlds of creation, whether of the higher or lower realms. In whatsoever thing these natures came into equilibrium that thing endured the passage of time, as ye behold with the sun and the moon; and in whatsoever thing these natures came not into balance, that thing passed quickly into extinction, even as ye observe to be the case with the creatures of the lower worlds. (Má'idíy-i-Asmání 4:82)⁴

80

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Some of the most recent developments in quantum physics lend support to the view that finite matter emerges from a single supersymmetric field known as the unified field, where the four fundamental forces of

nature—electromagnetism, strong and weak interactions, and gravitation — are completely unified (Freedman, van Nieuwenhuizen, “Supergravity” 126-43). It can be surmised that the unified field corresponds to “universal reality” in the following quotation:

The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the “First Mind,” and which the people of Bahá call the “First Will.” This emanation, in that which concerns its action in the world of God, is not limited by time or place; it is without beginning or end—beginning and end in relation to God are one. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 203)

This surmise is corroborated by ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s affirmation that the First

Will (also referred to as the Primal Will) “is the inner reality of things, and all

existing things are its manifestations (mazáhir) . . .” (Makátíb 3:356).⁵

According to Maharishi, the unified field sequentially gives rise to the diversity in creation through a process of self-referral and self-interaction (Maharishi, *Life Supported* 25-26; Chandler, “Introduction” 9-10). In physics, this process is known as spontaneous symmetry breaking: The unified field moving within itself generates the fundamental forces of nature and the fundamental matter fields. From the interaction of these fields, potential is transformed into actuality: The physical structures arise, specifically the DNA molecule (Wallace et al., “Vedic Physiology” 8-9).

A statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggests that creation unfolds in a sequential manner: “. . . the mind proveth the existence of an unseen Reality that embraceth all beings, and that existeth and revealeth itself in all stages (“Tablet to Dr Auguste Forel” 222).

The transformation of consciousness into matter is described in

Ayurveda as follows: Prakriti contains three gunas or attributes; sattva (essence), rajas (energy), and tamas (inertia). Five elements arise out of the interaction of the gunas: akash (space), vayu (air), agni (fire), jala (water), and prthvi (earth) (Caraka Samhita 1: 6-7; Sushruta Samhita 2: 114-21).⁶ These elements constitute all of the physical universe: A basic premise of Ayurveda is that the elements which exist in the macrocosm (nature) are also present in the microcosm (the individual) (Caraka

Samhita 1: 440; Sushruta Samhita 2: 118-21). This is affirmed in the Bahá’í writings. The following quotation has a broader meaning but is relevant nevertheless. Quoting ‘Alí, Bahá’u’lláh writes: “Dost thou reckon thyself

only a puny form / When within thee the universe is folded?” (Seven Valleys 34). This premise is also restated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “. . . all parts of Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá’í Exploration

81

the creational world are of one whole” (Bahá’í World Faith 364). In reference to animals and vegetables, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes, “. . .the animal, as to its

other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly. (Cited in Compilation 1: 71)

According to Ayurveda, biological and environmental rhythms get out of synchronization when there has been some violation of natural law, such as the practice of harmful habits, repression of emotions, environmental abuse, or incorrect diet (Caraka Samhita 1. 7, 120-21; Sushruta Samhita 1: 123, 201-3).¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that there are many different causes of disease: “. . . lustful appetites, . . . sin and contumacy (Selections 152-53), and sorrow (Star 19:254) among others. Maharishi Ayurveda identifies the first expression of the disease process on the quantum level, where consciousness, mind, and body interact (Chopra, “Bliss” 72). Quantum means the smallest possible unit of energy. The quantum level is therefore the deepest level of matter. Dr. Deepak Chopra has coined the term “quantum mechanical body” (“Bliss” 63). This conception of the human body enables one to regard it as “a silent flow of intelligence, a constant bubbling up of impulses that create, control and become your physical body” (Chopra, Perfect Health 10). The quantum mechanical body is viewed then, not as a static entity, but rather as a “flow of intelligence” subject to constant change. This view extends to embrace existence itself (Chopra, “Bliss” 71-73). The Bahá’í writings also put forward the view that existence is in a process of constant change.

‘Abdu’l-

Bahá writes:

Creation is the expression of motion. . . . All created forms are progressive in their planes, or kingdoms of existence, under the stimulus of the power or spirit of life. The universal energy is dynamic. Nothing is stationary in the material world of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness. (Promulgation 140)

Maharishi Ayurveda teaches that the disease process begins when there is a disruption in the “flow of intelligence.”¹² “Flow of intelligence” may be

equated with “mind force” in the following quotation:

The mind force—whether we call it pre-existent or contingent—doth direct and co-ordinate all the members of the human body, seeing to it that each part or member duly performeth its own special function. If, however, there be some interruption in the power of the mind, all the members will fail to carry out their essential functions, deficiencies will

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá’í Exploration

83

appear in the body and the functioning of its members, and the power will prove ineffective.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections 48)

Chopra uses a computer analogy to describe the mind-body relationship.

He asserts, “To change the printout out of the body. you must learn to rewrite the software of the mind” (Perfect Health 12). The mind writes the computer program, which in turn creates the printout, i.e., the physical body (Chopra, “Bliss” 62). Every thought the “program” processes in turn generates a chemical reaction in the body.¹³ The computer analogy can be demonstrated by the placebo effect. The placebo effect is the change in health status as a result of expectation rather than of a specific treatment. The Bahá’í writings acknowledge the effect of thought processes on the physical body: “. . . the sudden realization of a chief desire will give such joy that the nerves will be excited by it, and this excitement may produce health” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 255).

The reader may ask to what degree the computer model is compatible with the Bahá’í understanding, because in the Bahá’í view the critical condition for well-being is obedience to Bahá’í teachings. The point in question then is how congruent are Maharishi Ayurveda measures with Bahá’í principles. The discussion below will attempt to show that the measures improve physiological functioning and promote behavior in accordance with environmental and biological rhythms. It follows then that the adoption of such measures would be compatible with obedience to Bahá’í teachings. This writer still maintains, however, that we are all subject to the Will of God; therefore good health is dependent not only upon personal effort but also upon God’s grace. Maharishi Ayurveda teaches that treatment is regarded as most effective when it is applied on the quantum level (Chopra, “Bliss” 72). According to Chopra, more power is available on this level than on the gross level of the physiology: “What is at work here is the quantum principle, which reveals that the most subtle levels of nature hold the greatest potential energy” (Perfect Health 8). He cites the example of the laser, “which takes the same light that is emitted by a flashlight, and by organizing it into coherent quantum vibrations boosts its power enough to cut through steel” (Perfect Health 8).

The Mental Approach: Transcendental Meditation

The mental approach operates on the quantum level (Chopra, “Bliss” 72-73). It is therefore regarded as the most powerful therapeutic strategy. In Maharishi Ayurveda, Transcendental Meditation (TM) (a mental technique) is the primary prevention approach. The TM technique has been described as a systematic means for taking the conscious mind from active levels of awareness to more abstract and fundamental levels of mental activity, resulting in

the experience of pure consciousness” (Hagelin, “Is Consciousness” 62). During the experience of pure consciousness, the mind remains fully alert while experiencing profound silence, a state which has been shown to have physiological correlates such as decreased respiration rate and increased basal skin resistance (Dillbeck, Orme-Johnson, “Physiological Differences” 879-81). Extensive research demonstrates TM’s remarkable range of benefits.¹⁴ Meditation has an important role in the Bahá’í teachings:

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves....

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly... (‘Abdu’l Bahá, Paris Talks 175)

Some readers may find a semantic difficulty with the word meditation. It is not proposed that TM equates with “meditation” as it is most frequently employed in the Bahá’í writings; to imply reflection on the Word of God: Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings. (Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets 143)

An in-depth discussion is not possible within the confines of this article. Chopra, however, addresses this point (Quantum Healing 182-83).

The Super Radiance Effect

The “Super Radiance Effect” or “Maharishi Effect” can be defined as the improved quality of life produced when, in one place, the square root of one percent of a population practises the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field (MTUF)—TM and the TM-Sidhi program (Hagelin, “Is Consciousness” 64-65). The TM-Sidhi program is a set of specific procedures prescribed in the Vedic literature that train the individual to function from the level of the unified field (Chandler, “Introduction” 20). As Maharishi describes it: In this program, human awareness identifies itself with that most wide and most powerful level of nature’s functioning and starts to function from there. The purpose of the TM-Sidhi program is to consciously create activity from that level from where nature performs. (Life Supported 74)¹⁵

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá’í Exploration

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the group practice of the MTUF has the effect of decreasing crime and accident rates, and of reducing violence and international conflict.¹⁶ According to physicist Dr. John Hagelin,

the Super Radiance Effect illustrates the principle known as constructive interference (Scientific Research 71). In applying this principle to society, it is

found that the effect generated is proportional to the square of the number of individuals practising the MTUF (Hagelin, "Is Consciousness" 65). If, as research findings suggest, the Super Radiance Effect contributes to the peacemaking process, Bahá'ís could expect references to be made to such an effect

in the Bahá'í writings. I submit the hypothesis that the following quotation

refers to the MTUF:

In the treasuries of the knowledge of God there lieth concealed a knowledge which, when applied, will largely, though not wholly, eliminate fear.

This knowledge, however, should be taught from childhood, as it will greatly aid in its elimination. Whatever decreaseth fear increaseth courage.

Should the Will of God assist Us, there would flow out from the Pen of the Divine Expounder a lengthy exposition of that which hath been mentioned, and there would be revealed, in the field of arts and sciences, what would renew the world and the nations. A word hath, likewise, been written down and recorded by the Pen of the Most High in the Crimson Book which is capable of fully disclosing that force which is hid in men, nay of redoubling its potency. We implore God—exalted and glorified be He—to graciously assist His servants to do that which is pleasing and acceptable unto Him. (Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle 32)

When Shoghi Effendi was asked about the meaning of this passage, his secretary replied on his behalf: "Unfortunately it would seem that the knowledge 'which could largely eliminate fear' has not been disclosed or identified

by Bahá'u'lláh, so we do not know what it is" (Bahá'í News 210: 3).

As the

first major experiment to measure the sociological effects of the collective practice of the MTUF was not conducted until 1983, the Super Radiance Effect was not known about at the time this letter was written.¹⁷

To test the hypothesis, it is necessary to determine whether the theoretical understanding and research into the MTUF are consistent with Bahá'u'lláh's

exposition in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. A brief inquiry is offered here.

First and foremost, the sociological measures of reduced violence and international conflict cited above constitute powerful evidence to suggest that the application of the MTUF satisfies the primary condition: "eliminate fear."

What other pointers are provided? We find: "that force which is hid in men." It has already been contended that the unified field (which, according to Hagelin is "experienced as the most fundamental state of human awareness"

["Is Consciousness" 59]) is the unification of the four fundamental forces

of

nature (Freedman, van Nieuwenhuizen, "Supergravity" 126-43). Thus, this

86

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

statement provides support to the view that the organizing power of the unified field accords with a literal interpretation of "that force which is hid in men."

A careful scrutiny of the Crimson Book (the Book of the Covenant, and the book "which is capable of fully disclosing that force . . .") sheds more light.

We find:

O ye My Branches! A mighty force. a consummate power lieth concealed in the world of being. Fix your gaze upon it and upon its unifying influence, and not upon the differences which appear from it.

(Bahá'u'lláh,

"The Book of the Covenant," Tablets 221)

It can be conjectured that "mighty force" may also be identified as the organizing power of the unified field. On what basis is this conjecture made?

Bahá'u'lláh tells us that this "mighty force" has a "unifying influence." It has

been asserted that a unifying influence is generated when individual consciousness functions from the level of the unified field during the practice of

the MTUF (Hagelin, Scientific Research 70; Orme-Johnson, et al.,

"International Peace Project" 806). This assertion is supported by research which

shows that coherence is generated during the practice.¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh also tells

us that "differences" appear from this "mighty force." If this interpretation of

"mighty force" is correct, it would follow that "differences" may refer to the

diversity of the phenomenal world, which, according to Maharishi, emerges from the unified field (Life Supported 25-26; Chandler, "Introduction" 10).

Bahá'u'lláh provides one further instruction: "Fix your gaze upon it and upon

its unifying influence, and not upon the differences which appear from it."

It

is possible that Bahá'u'lláh is exhorting human beings to detach themselves

from the phenomenal world, and to turn their attention to the spiritual realm.

The inference here, that the unified field is in the spiritual realm, may find support in the following excerpt from a letter written by Shoghi Effendi:

"The essence of existence is a spiritual reality because invisible forces of the

spirit are the origin of matter and the foundation thereof" (cited in Brown,

“A

Bahá’í Perspective” 29).

Equally striking is the point in Bahá’u’lláh’s exposition in Epistle to the

Son of the Wolf “. . . there would be revealed, in the field of arts and sciences,

what would renew the world and the nations” (32). This quotation provides a further pillar of support to the hypothesis since the MTUF also has experimental and applied values in the arts and sciences. Its ability to show how a

discipline relates to the unified field of natural law is providing profound insights into many traditional academic disciplines (Dillbeck, “Maharishi Technology” 398-99). 19

Given that international peace is the “most momentous question of this day” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in Compilation 2: 168), and given the research findings on the MTUF, this technology merits serious examination.

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá’í Exploration

87

Diagnosis and Individualized Treatment

A distinctive advantage of Ayurveda is that its diagnostic methods (in particular pulse diagnosis) can identify an imbalance at the unmanifest level (Caraka Samhita 1: 325-28; Sushruta Samhita 1: 210; Rigby, “New Perspectives” 82), allowing treatment to intervene before disease becomes manifest, when it can be difficult and costly to treat.²⁰ (These methods are in sharp contrast to those in Western medicine, which can generally only recognize disease when it is organically obvious.)

Individualized treatment is a distinguishing feature of Ayurveda. As explained above, individuals are vulnerable to different diseases according to their unique combination of doshas. To maximize immunity to disease and to achieve balance by eliminating excessive accumulation of the doshas, treatment must be tailored to the needs of the individual. The vaidya (Ayurvedic practitioner) takes into account the individual’s psychosomatic type, condition, environment, and other influencing factors (Caraka Samhita 1:124, 326, 448; Sushruta Samhita 1: 185-86, 210, 232).

Individualized treatment is affirmed by ‘Abdu’l Bahá:

The skillful physician does not give the same medicine to cure each disease and each malady, but he changes remedies and medicines according to the different necessities of the diseases and constitutions.

(Some Answered Questions 94)

Therapeutic Strategies

There are many therapeutic strategies in Maharishi Ayurveda. ²¹ Most strategies enliven innate self-repair mechanisms and increase internal biological strength (Rothenberg, Averbach, “Three Important Studies” 3). Ayurvedic treatments are therefore preventive as well as curative. It is the intelligence (order) in a treatment that triggers the healing process (Chopra, “Bliss” 69-70). “Intelligence” may be equated with “mind” in the

following quotation: “All that we see around us is the work of mind. It is mind

in the herb and in the mineral that acts on the human body, and changes its condition” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Star 8.18: 233). It is relevant to point out here that the use of herbs and minerals comprises important rejuvenation strategies in Ayurveda. This use will be discussed in more detail below. The Bahá’í writings make it clear that many approaches can be used to restore health:

The state or condition through which healing takes place is the condition of the heart. By some this state is reached through pills, powders, and physicians. By others through hygiene, fasting, and prayer. By others through direct perception. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Star 8.18: 233)

88

Australian Bahá’í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Diet

‘Abdu’l-Bahá foresaw the use of dietary measures:

When the science of medicine reaches perfection, treatment will be given by foods, aliments, fragrant fruits and vegetables, and by various waters, hot and cold in temperature. (Some Answered Questions 258-59)

Diet is regarded as extremely important in Ayurveda and therefore deserves special attention. According to Ayurveda, a person can intuitively gravitate towards the foods she or he requires to maintain balance (Caraka Samhita 1: 231; Sushruta Samhita 1: lxiii). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms this view: “... when

the constitution is in a state of equilibrium, there is no doubt that whatever is

relished will be beneficial to health” (Selections 155). He cites the example of animals, which have no knowledge of pharmacopoeia and yet are able “according to a natural law” to differentiate between numerous plants and find the one that will cure their disease (Selections 154). This ability is conditional upon the constitution’s being in a “state of equilibrium.”

Ayurveda

teaches that many people have strayed far from their natural diet and in so doing developed a doshic imbalance (Caraka Samhita 1: 448). Consequently their power of discrimination does not function as accurately as it might.

Accordingly, the Maharishi Ayurveda practitioner recommends dietary programs that are specifically prescribed to redress the doshic imbalance (Caraka Samhita 1: 447-48; Sushruta Samhita 1: lxii, 186). The taste and the quality of food affect the doshas. For example, unctuous (oily) foods increase kapha and decrease vata. A person with a vata imbalance would therefore be advised to increase intake of these foods, especially when vata is aggravated (Caraka Samhita 1: 448-49; Glaser, “Maharishi Ayurveda” 102). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated:

It is the function of a skilled physician to determine which constituent of his patient’s body hath suffered diminution, which hath been augmented.

Once he hath discovered this, he must prescribe a food containing the diminished element in considerable amounts, to re-establish the body's essential equilibrium. (Selections 154)²²

Waters are also used. Differing amounts and temperatures are prescribed according to psychosomatic types and seasons (Sushruta Samhita 2: 497).

Pharmacology

The pharmacology of Ayurveda is an extensive science that has been refined by many centuries of experience. The ancient Ayurvedic texts detail the properties and effects of a vast number of herbal and mineral remedies. According to Ayurveda, plants contain chemicals that counterbalance undesirable effects of their active ingredients. Therefore, the entire part of the plant is commonly used, an important reason why iatrogenic illness—illness caused

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá'í Exploration
89

by the adverse effects of treatment—is avoided (Glaser, “Maharishi Ayurveda”

95-96, 100). (This method is in contrast to the common practice in Western medicine of using the active ingredient in isolation.²³) Since Ayurvedic principles are based on natural law (which is universal), the knowledge is not confined to the indigenous flora of India. Ayurveda recognizes that the native plants of a given country are the most beneficial for the health of the people living in that country. Research is being carried out on the medicinal value of flora from many countries.²⁴

Special herbal and mineral preparations are used in rasayana therapy.

Rasayanas are health-promoting treatments that revitalize the essence of the physiology (Caraka Samhita 2: 3-4; Sushruta Samhita 2: 515). Recently, the knowledge of an ancient and long-lost rasayana renowned for its health-bestowing properties, namely amrit kalash, has been revived, chiefly by Dr.

Balaraj Maharishi. Traditionally, it is considered to enhance immune response, promote homeostasis, and increase a sense of well-being (Glaser, “Maharishi Ayurveda” 94). Research on “Maharishi Amrit Kalash” is at the initial stage.

However, findings to date appear to confirm traditional observations.²⁵

Eating Habits

In Ayurveda, the manner in which a person eats is as important as the type of food eaten because if food is properly digested, a vivifying principle called

ojas is maximized. Ojas is essential for strength and immunity (Caraka Samhita 1: 120; Sushruta Samhita 1:130, 556-64).²⁶ Maharishi Ayurveda recommends a number of “Body Intelligence Tips” (Chopra, Perfect Health 256)

to increase ojas and promote perfect digestion. Many of these recommendations are enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh in “Tablet to a Physician” (Star 13.9: 252).²⁷ In the following pairs, the first quotation is from “Tablet to a

Physician,” unless stated otherwise, and the second quotation is from Perfect Health

256.

* “O people, do not eat except when you are hungry.” “Eat only when you feel hungry.”

* “Do not take nourishment except when [the process of] digestion is completed.” “Wait until one meal is digested before eating the next.

* “If two diametrically opposite foods are put on the table do not mix them.”

“Drink milk separately from meals, either alone or with other sweet foods.”

(In Ayurveda there are a number of foods that should not be mixed [Sushruta Samhita 1:186-88].)

* “If a man eats too much, he ruins his digestion...” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá,

Paris

Talks 49) “Leave one third to one-quarter of your stomach empty to aid digestion.”

The Bahá’í writings affirm numerous additional Ayurvedic practices such as the taking of a light breakfast (Star 13.9: 252).

90

Australian Bahá’í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Sound

Therapeutic use of sound (Gaudharva-Veda) is a powerful approach in Maharishi Ayurveda. Voice and melodic sounds are used to heal disorders and to restore balance in the physiology. To explain: Maharishi Ayurveda teaches that unmanifest sounds (resonance frequencies) form the basis of the quantum mechanical body. Imbalances occur when these sounds get out of synchronization. An imbalance can be corrected by matching the complementary frequency, a principle called “complementarity” (Chopra, “Bliss” 68-70). It is of interest that Transcendental Meditation heals by the same principle. In this technique, a sound is used internally in an abstract form on the level of thought. Significant recognition is given to the healing effect of sound in the Bahá’í writings:

A fine voice when joined to beautiful music causes a great effect, for both are desirable and pleasing. All these have in themselves an organization, and are constructed on natural law. Therefore, they correspond to the order of existence like something which would fit into a mold. . . .

When it is so, this affects the nerves, and they affect the heart and spirit.

(‘Abdu’l Bahá, quoted in Compilation 2: 78)

Conclusion

It is hoped that the interested reader will be moved to investigate further the wealth of Maharishi Ayurveda—not only for one’s own health but more importantly to enable one to better serve the Kingdom. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out the effect of good health on one’s capacity to serve:

Between material things and spiritual things there is a connection.

The more healthful his body the greater will be the power of the spirit of

man; the power of the intellect, the power of the memory, the power of reflection will then be greater. (Star 8.18: 229-230)

It is hoped also that Bahá'í Vedic scholars will further explore and elaborate on subjects discussed in this article. Bahá'ís are advised to weigh knowledge in the balance established by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, so that anything not in keeping with the Word of God can be disregarded and that which is valuable, accepted. With this exhortation on one hand, and 'Abdu'l Bahá's exhortation to "Put all your beliefs into harmony with science. . ." (Paris Talks 146) on the other, Bahá'ís will be well armed to make a discerning assessment of the value of Maharishi Ayurveda. For my own part, this preliminary survey has brought me to the realization that Maharishi Ayurveda has the mechanics to put many of the Bahá'í teachings into practice and help to make Shoghi Effendi's vision a reality:

The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends . . . to the extermination of Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá'í Exploration

91

disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, . . . to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race. (World Order 204)

References

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá Makátíb-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá (Collected Letters). Vol. 3. Cairo: Kurdistán-I-'Ilmíyyih, 1921.
- __. Paris Talks. 11th ed. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969.
- __. Promulgation of Universal Peace, The: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912. Comp. Howard MacNutt. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- __. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Comp. Research Dept. Bahá'í World Centre. Trans. Marzieh Gail et al. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.
- __. Some Answered Questions. Comp. and trans. Laura Clifford Barney. 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981.
- __. "Tablet to Dr Auguste Forel" in The Bahá'í Revelation. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955.
- Bahá'u'lláh. Alwáh-i-Mubárák-i-Hadrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh. (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh). Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978.
- __. Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. Trans. Shoghi Effendi. 3d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.

- ___ . Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Trans. Shoghi Effendi. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976.
- ___ . Má'idíy-i-Ásmání. Vol. 4. Comp. Ishráq Khávarí. Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 129 B.E.
- ___ . The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys. Trans. M. Gail with AK. Khan. 3d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978.
- ___ . Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb i Aqdas. Comp. Research Department. Trans. H. Taherzadeh et al. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978.
- ___ . "Tablet to a Physician" in *Star of the West*, 13.9 Oxford: George Ronald, 1978.
- Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l Bahá. Bahá'í World Faith. Rev. ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956.
- Brown, Keven. "A Bahá'í Perspective on the Origin of Matter." *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2.3 (1990): 15-44.
- Caraka Samhita. Trans. P. V. Sharma. 2 volumes. Varanasi, India: Chaukhamba Orientalia, 1981.
- 92 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001
- Chandler, Kenneth. "Modern Science and Vedic Science: An Introduction." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 1.1(1987): 5-26.
- Chopra, Deepak. "Bliss and the Quantum Mechanical Body." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 2.1 (1988) 60-74.
- ___ . Perfect Health. New York: Harmony Books, 1990.
- ___ . Quantum Healing. New York: Bantam Books, 1989.
- ___ . Total Health: The Rediscovery of Ayurveda (six tape audio series) produced by Stichting Maharishi Ayurveda Products, Holland 1988.
- Compilation of Compilations, The. Two volumes prepared by the Universal House of Justice 1963 1990. Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991.
- Dillbeck, Michael C. "Intervention Studies on Reduction of Domestic and International Violence through Collective Consciousness." In *Abstracts and Summaries of Contributed Papers, Third Midwest Conference for the United States Institute of Peace*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987: 10.
- Dillbeck, Michael C., and Edward C. Bronson. "Short Term Longitudinal Effects of the Transcendental Meditation Technique on EEG Power and Coherence." *International Journal of Neuroscience* 14 (1981): 147-51.
- Dillbeck, Michael C., and Susan Levin Dillbeck. "The Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field in Education: Principles, Practice, and Research." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 1.4 (1987): 383-431.
- Dillbeck, Michael C., and David W. Orme Johnson. "Physiological Differences between Transcendental Meditation and Rest." *American Psychologist* 42 (1987):

Esslemont, J. E. Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era. Rev. ed. Wilmette:

Bahá'í

Publishing Trust, 1980.

Freedman, Daniel Z., and Peter van Nieuwenhuizen. "Supergravity and the Unification of the Laws of Physics." *Scientific American* 238.2 (1978): 126-43.

Glaser, Jay L. "Maharishi Ayurveda: An Introduction to Recent Research." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 2.1 (1988): 89-108.

Hagelin, John S. "Is Consciousness the Unified Field? A Field Theorist's Perspective." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 1.1 (1987): 29-87.

Janssen, G. W. H. M. "The Application of Maharishi Ayur-Veda in the Treatment of Ten Chronic Diseases: A Pilot Study." *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Integrale Geneeskunde* 5.33 (October 1989): 586-94.

Lovell-Smith, David. "Diagnosis by the Pulse." *New Zealand General Practice* (October 23, 1990): 24-25.

"Maharishi Ayurveda, Vanaushadhi Samrat Dr Balaraj Maharishi." *Maharishi World Centre of Ayurveda, Holland: Maharishi Vedic University Press, 1987.*

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. *Life Supported by Natural Law*. Washington: Age of Enlightenment Press, 1-86.

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá'í Exploration

93

Momen, Moojan. "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics." In *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*. Vol. 5. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1989: 185-217.

Orme-Johnson, David. "Medical Care Utilization and the Transcendental Meditation Program." *Psychosomatic Medicine* 49 (1987): 493-507.

Orme-Johnson, David, et al. "International Peace Project in the Middle East: The Effects of the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32 (1988): 776-812.

Orme-Johnson, Rhoda F. "A Unified Field Theory of Literature." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 1.3 (1987): 323-73.

Rigby, Byron P. "New Perspectives in Medical Practice: The Psychophysiological Approach of Maharishi Ayurveda." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 2.1(1988): 76-87.

Rothenberg, Stuart, and Richard Avenbach. "Three Important Studies on the Transcendental Meditation Program and Improving the Immune System." *MAAA Newsletter* 3.1 (1989): 3.

Scheier, Ronni L. "MDs Eager to Convey Message of the East." *American Medical News* (Jan.24-31, 1986): 104.

Schneider, R., et al. "Physiological and Psychological Correlates of Maharishi Ayurveda Psychosomatic Types." Paper presented at the Eighth World Congress of the International College of Psychosomatic Medicine, 3-7 September 1985, Chicago, Illinois, USA.

Scientific Research on the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field: The Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi Program. Iowa: Maharishi International

University Press, 1988.

Sharma, H. M., and R. V. Panganamala. "Inhibition of Human Platelet Aggregation in Vitro by Maharishi Amrit Kalash." *Journal of the Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology* 2.4: Abstract no. 606, March 1988.

Shoghi Effendi. *Advent of Divine Justice*. 4th ed. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984.

—. Excerpts from Letters of the Guardian to Assemblies and Individual Believers. *Bahá'í News* 210 (August 1948): 2-3.

—. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*. 2d ed. Wilmette, IL:

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974.

Star of the West. 8:18, 13:9, 19. Oxford: George Ronald, 1978.

Sushruta Samhita. Trans. K. K. Bhishagratna. 2 volumes. Varanasi, India: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1981.

The Throne of the Inner Temple. Comp. Elias Zohoori. Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 1985.

"Traditional Medicine: Views from the South-East Asia Region." *WHO Chronicle* 31(1977): 47-52.

94 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Universal House of Justice. Letter. 8 June 1989. *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 4.3/

4 (1990): 58.

Wallace, Robert Keith, et al. "Systolic Blood Pressure and Long-Term Practice of the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi Program: Effects of TM on Systolic Blood Pressure." *Psychosomatic Medicine* 45.1 (March 1983): 41-46.

Wallace, Robert Keith, John B. Fagan, and David S. Pasco. "Vedic Physiology." *Modern Science and Vedic Science* 2.1 (1988): 3-59.

Endnotes

1. Ayurveda has been given recognition by the World Health Organization. See, for example, "Traditional Medicine: Views from the South-East Asia Region."
2. Maharishi is the founding teacher of Transcendental Meditation and the founder of several institutions and organizations, including the World Federation of Ayurveda (1985) and the Iowa-based Maharishi International University (1971). This university combines study of traditional disciplines with study and research in consciousness. It is accredited through the Ph.D. level by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Maharishi's work, which has its basis in the Vedic tradition, is open to empirical verification. Many rigorous studies have been published in major scientific journals.
3. The author discusses "Maharishi Ayurveda" as distinguishable from "Ayurveda" for two reasons. First, her research and experience is in Maharishi Ayurveda. Second, a number of major distinctions (identified in

this article) exist between the two. However, she readily acknowledges that Ayurveda is widely practised in India and elsewhere. Ayurveda is referred to where applicable.

4. Provisional translation by Keven Brown, “A Bahá’í Perspective” 35-36.

5. Provisional translation by Keven Brown, “A Bahá’í Perspective” 24.

The

preceding quotation reveals the Bahá’í view that God is the progenitor of the creative process, not the creative process itself. Some schools of Vedic philosophy hold a pantheistic view. Bahá’í scholar Dr. Moojan Momen argues for a resolution of the dichotomy from a relativist position in “Relativism: A Basis for Bahá’í Metaphysics.”

6. The reader will observe that the space element, akash, does not appear in Bahá’u’lláh’s exposition above. A deeper understanding of the function of this element will help to resolve this apparent distinction. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, Perfect Health 58-59. The above description of Sankhya philosophy of cosmic evolution is a radical simplification. A detailed comparative assessment cannot be made here, as the author is not qualified to do so. Moreover, it would require a paper Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá’í Exploration

95

of its own. Interested readers should consult Deepak Chopra, Total Health; Moojan Momen, “Relativism”; and Keven Brown, “A Bahá’í Perspective.” For a discussion of the apparent correspondences between the structures of existence described in Sankhya philosophy and those described in modern theoretical physics, see Hagelin, “Is Consciousness” 75-76.

7. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, Total Health.

8. It is of interest that pitta individuals are also susceptible to liver disorders

(Sushruta Samhita 2: 52), as Bahá’u’lláh writes “. . . anger doth burn the

liver . (quoted in Esselmont, Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era 108).

Admittedly, Bahá’u’lláh may not have intended this statement to be interpreted

literally, but it is certainly consistent with an aggravated pitta condition.

9. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, Perfect Health, ch. 2.

10. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, Total Health.

11. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, Perfect Health, ch. 4.

12. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, “Bliss.”

13. The mind body relationship is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, Quantum Healing.

14. See, for example, David Orme-Johnson, “Medical Care Utilization.” This study found that regular participants in the TM program had lower medical utilization rates than did other members of the same insurance carrier.

For example, outpatient visits per 1000 were 46.8% fewer than the norm for children (0 to 18), 54.7% fewer for young adults (19 to 39), and 73.7% fewer for older adults (40+).

15. For research, see for example, R. Keith Wallace, et al., "Systolic Blood Pressure." This study found that subjects practising the TM and TM-Sidhi programs showed a significantly lower systolic blood pressure than were the norms for the general population.

16. For Bahá'ís, it is indubitably clear that "that which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Compilation 2*: 157) and that the principal means for

its establishment is the Covenant. However, Bahá'u'lláh also counsels: "In all circumstances one should seize upon every means which will promote security and tranquillity among the peoples of the world" (*Tablets 171*). For research on the group practice of the MTUF, see for example, D. W. Orme-Johnson, et al., "International Peace Project." This study found that the group practice of TM and the TM-Sidhi program in Jerusalem during August and September, 1983, resulted in reduced conflict in Lebanon and improved quality of life in Israel. Dependent variables included war deaths in Lebanon; Israeli national stock index; crime rates,

96 Australian Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

etc. Other variables such as temperature and holidays were explicitly controlled. A review of research design, methods of data collection, controls, etc., is not possible within the confines of this article.

17. See for example, M. C. Dillbeck, "Intervention Studies." In this experiment at Maharishi International University from December 17, 1983, to January 6, 1984, the group practising the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field numbered more than 7000, which is approximately the square root of 1% of the world's population. This study showed that there were reductions in international conflicts (36%, based on newspaper content analysis), a rise in a worldwide economic index (measured by market value of the stock markets in nineteen countries), decreased traffic fatalities in the United States, etc.

18. See for example, M. C. Dillbeck and E. C. Bronson, "Short Term Longitudinal Effects." This study found that EEG coherence increases longitudinally over time as a result of the practice of the TM program.

19. See for example, Rhoda Orme-Johnson, "A Unified Field Theory."

20. Explanation of pulse diagnosis in Deepak Chopra, *Perfect Health* 137. Medical comment in David Lovell-Smith, "Diagnosis by the Pulse." Research in R. Schneider, et al., "Physiological and Psychological Correlates." This study found that Maharishi Ayurveda psychosomatic types were found to overlap with modern systems of typing. Ayurvedic pulse diagnosis was used to diagnose psychosomatic types.

21. For a discussion of the major healing approaches of Maharishi Ayurveda, see Deepak Chopra, *Perfect Health*, ch. 7. It is notable that Maharishi Ayurveda treatments are standardized worldwide. It is not possible within the confines of this article to discuss all major approaches.

22. Since many of the Bahá'í writings have not yet been translated into English, the author does not yet have access to a number of relevant tablets such as the *Lawh-i-Tibb*. About this tablet Keven Brown writes: "In the *Lawh-i-Tibb* (Tablet of Healing) Bahá'u'lláh outlines a healthful regimen, which if followed, He says, will preserve the normal equilibrium of the natures of the body and ensure that the primary substance (as1) remains in its pristine purity (Alwáh 224)" ("A Bahá'í Perspective" 40).

23. The author wishes to acknowledge the advancement of Western medicine, in particular in surgery and other treatments in crisis management. There are, however, many aspects in Western medicine in which Maharishi Ayurveda has been shown to offer improvements, such as the prediction of therapeutic response, cost effectiveness, and patient compliance. See Byron P. Rigby, "New Perspectives." It should be understood that Maharishi is committed to the integration of Ayurveda with Western medical practice. This commitment, together with his rigorous scientific approach, substantive published research on Transcendental Meditation, the

Maharishi Ayurveda: A Bahá'í Exploration

97

extensive ancient texts, and Ayurveda's internally consistent theoretical framework has attracted the interest and support of a considerable number of medical doctors. See Jay L. Glaser, "Maharishi Ayurveda" 91 and Ronni L. Scheier, "MDs Eager" 104.

24. For commentary, see "Maharishi Ayurveda, Vanaushadhi Samrat Dr Balaraj Maharishi." For research, see for example G. W. H. M. Janssen, "The Application of Maharishi Ayur-Veda." This study found Maharishi Ayurveda to be effective in the treatment of ten chronic diseases. Seventy-nine percent of 126 patients had significant improvements after three months' treatment with herbal preparations. No harmful side effects were noted. The ten chronic diseases were: bronchial asthma, eczema, psoriasis, chronic bronchitis, hypertension, chronic sinusitis, chronic constipation, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes mellitus, and headaches (including migraine headaches).

25. See, for example, H. M. Sharma and R. V. Panganamala, "Inhibition of Human Platelet Aggregation." This study found that Maharishi Amrit Kalash reduced the aggregation of blood platelets in the test tube. These findings indicate that it may be useful in the prevention of cardiovascular disorders associated with the formulation of blood clots.

26. This subject is dealt with in more detail in Deepak Chopra, *Perfect Health*, ch. 12. In regard to alcohol, Maharishi Ayurveda teaches that it "destroys ojas" (Chopra, *Perfect Health* 259) and therefore, to quote `Abdu'l-Bahá, "weakeneth the nerves and consumeth the mind" (quoted in *Throne* 43).

27. A full translation of "Tablet to a Physician" is not yet available. The

following is an excerpt from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:
“The Tablet to a Physician was addressed to a man who was a student of the old type of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used by the medical men of those days. These terms are quite different from those used by modern medicine, and one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Bahá’u’lláh was elucidating” (quoted in letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated 8 June 1989, which appeared in the Bahá’í Studies Bulletin 4:3-4 [1990]: 58).

98 Australian Bahá’í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Unhealthy Science,
Religion, and Humanities:
The Deep Connection and
what Bahá’u’lláh had to say
about it*
Ron House

Abstract

Looking at the range of social, political, and environmental problems in the modern world, most Bahá’ís will have no difficulty giving due credence to Bahá’u’lláh’s assessment: “Such shall be [the world’s] plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. ... when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake.” (GWB. LXI) Wise as Bahá’u’lláh’s decision not to explain in plain language undoubtedly is, His writings do, however, appear to contain veiled references to a single crucial philosophical error that this writer has identified underlying many of the serious mis-steps in modern science, philosophy, religious understanding, and most disciplines in the humanities. This paper explains this error, traceable to Hume (although Hume himself repudiated it), and presents tantalising material by Bahá’u’lláh, which, though heavily disguised, points the finger at precisely the mistake that the world, unaware, has adopted in various forms as a central pillar of modern thought. The failure of the modern intellectual edifice would produce a profound crisis of faith in the world’s scientific, rationalistic, non-theistic zeitgeist and, the author speculates, this could produce much greater long-term destruction to the world’s fabric than any calamity of a purely material nature (short of actual extinction of human life).

Introduction

Today I want to discuss some matters connected with the state of affairs

* A presentation delivered at the ABS Conference on “Health, Healing and Religion”, Toowoomba, September 30 - October 1, 2000.

that Bahá'u'lláh predicted would precede the 'calamity', and to offer some

thoughts about what that calamity might be. He wrote:

"The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody." (Gleanings LXI)

I believe it is now possible to discern some of the distinctive characteristics of the 'unbelief' that Bahá'u'lláh predicted would envelop the world, and

I want to mention one today. It is a somewhat abstract philosophical notion, but one with surprising practical consequences. Let me start, though, by listing some of the things that I see as negative consequences of the principle I

want to talk about. Some of the items I'll list here will probably surprise you,

and there might not be much obvious connection amongst them, so please bear with me for the moment. Also, the argument I want to make is too big for a one-hour talk, so a lot of what I'll say I won't have time to justify.

With that proviso, let's take a look at some examples from various fields where I believe serious mis-steps are being made:

* In science, falsifiability; this is the notion that scientific theories can never be proved, only disproved (originally from Popper).

* In the humanities, many examples:

Science as a power struggle - for example, the claim that Newton's Principia might as well be called Newton's rape manual, also misuse of Kuhn's 'paradigm' theory to imply, for example, that voodoo and science are merely different ways of knowing, neither better than the other, with science having greater credence only because of power relations.

Deconstruction, postmodernism, poststructuralism, etc. All these have in common a disbelief in any absolute claim to knowledge. Typical claims are (from deconstruction) "There is nothing but the text" - that is, denial of meaning; (and from postmodernism) the idea that a history book is no different from a novel - denying objective truth.

* In religion, fundamentalism. Seemingly quite different from the preceding, I hope to show the family resemblance later.

* In economics, free market philosophy and economic rationalism.

* In law, the replacement of the principle of natural rights by ‘community standards’ etc.

It may seem surprising to lump all these in the same basket, as apparently they represent divergent world views, in some cases almost direct opposites. I hope to show how all of these apparently divergent examples have underlying common factors and represent a loss of belief that is worthy of Bahá'u'lláh's description quoted above. We'll start by taking a look at two different conceptions of how to gain knowledge, in the course of which I hope to convince you that one way is better than the other, and then examine the underlying philosophical error behind the less satisfactory way; then we'll look at how the error has influenced some of the fields listed above.

Two Ways of Understanding

The first way is the well-known Cartesian program: start with indisputable premises and deduce, using correct logical procedures, further conclusions from the premises.

To see what is involved here, let us consider how fallible creatures obtain knowledge. Is it in fact true that we, in daily life, proceed by deduction from unassailable premises, the implication being that anything less than certainty is unacceptable? This is discussed by Prof. Frederick L. Will in his book, *Induction and Justification*. He remarks that “Of course instincts and the rest

do fail, but they do not all fail simultaneously and completely, and the ideal of objectivity does not require that we treat them as if they had... A reason for doubting... whether A shot B, is not itself a reason for doubting the existence of firearms, explosives, or projectiles. It is in terms of a settled background of

practice, belief, opinion, and presumption about such things that an investigation can be launched and conducted in such a way that partisans of different judgments on the matter can agree that the matter at issue was dealt with

by a procedure that did not itself in any way favour or prejudice the rightness of the claims or counterclaims that were involved.”

What I believe is the issue here is this: that as fallible creatures in a universe in which nothing can be known in itself as an absolute certainty, we proceed by creating pictures of reality. The ‘homo erectus’ walking across the African plain had a picture of the herds of animals, the lions stalking them, the stripped bones of the animals after the various carnivores had finished with the kill, and, within the large bones, the nutritious marrow; so he acted in accordance with his understanding of reality and waited for the

carnivores to leave the scene, then with a large rock brought there for the purpose, smashed the bones and obtained food. The process was not infallible: perhaps he believed that an appeal to a god or goddess would lead the herd in a certain direction, whereas the truth might be that his intuitions based on

102

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

observation led him to foresee the future movement of the herd. Similarly, modern humans make pictures, both everyday and scientific. Thus the Newtonian worldview of physics made some things seem more likely than others. I believe Lord Kelvin once said that understanding something in physics was the same as knowing the mechanism by which it happened. Since the advent of quantum mechanics, however, such an understanding of explanation in physics has become untenable. We are led to see the point behind Kuhn's idea of paradigms; that one world view can be replaced by another when two things happen: the preponderance of evidence makes the old view untenable, and a new view exists to take its place. (But more about Kuhn later.)

Now let me return to the question of fundamentalism and deconstructionism. It seems to me that both these ideas are related to the flawed Cartesian program for obtaining knowledge - flawed because we can't have the certainty needed for the program to succeed.

The deconstructionist says "Because I can't be certain, because everything is embedded in some paradigm related to my society, therefore I cannot know anything; therefore there is no impartial truth, nothing is beyond the text, everything is political, everything is a power relation." And so on. Deconstructionism accepts that the Cartesian program fails, but incorrectly assumes that this program is the only one on offer.

Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is the persistent use of the failed paradigm. Whether because no new paradigm is discernable, or because the new paradigm is unacceptable, the fundamentalist continues the Cartesian program: a religious text is deemed to be the source of unimpeachable truth and the words of that text are examined minutely and conclusions deduced, without checking those conclusions against any wider view of the world or any considerations of rationality or ethics.

But Bahá'u'lláh teaches that truth is to be obtained also from sources other than scriptures. In the Four Valleys He says: "Hereafter We will show them our signs in the regions of the earth, and in themselves, until it become manifest unto them that it is the truth..." In this one passage He clearly alludes to both science and mysticism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also teaches that religion

must be in conformity with science: "...religion must be in harmony with science and reason. If it does not conform to science and reconcile with reason it is superstition." (Bahá'í World Faith, p. 247)

The Cartesian program at the root of both the harmful humanist philosophies of today and also religious fundamentalism is clearly unable to reconcile the above quotations with Bahá'u'lláh's strong emphasis on the eternal

verities He has revealed to mankind in this dispensation.

We might call the alternative to Cartesianism the “method of faith”.

Clearly

faith is not about believing something for which there is no evidence; that is fundamentalism, not faith. A person of true faith accepts and trusts the method

Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities

103

that God has given us for learning truth in an uncertain universe: to compare what we see with our complete understanding of the world and ourselves, and trust that by following rational methods informed by our fullest sources of information, we can proceed successfully. God has not created a malicious universe. The fullest sources of information include, as well as practical facts

about the universe, a knowledge of our own natures as sentient, feeling beings with the capacity for love, friendship, empathy, and so on - as well as our capacity for hate, vindictiveness, and other vices.

From time to time in history someone has produced a new paradigm, a new way of understanding our spiritual condition. Thus Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, an incisive understanding of our psychological and spiritual reality, along with techniques for bringing our spirits into accord with the laws of the universe. Similarly, Jesus taught the doctrine of love, and told

us how we can find the Kingdom of Heaven through action: the practice of love and goodness in our real, present lives. Likewise Bahá'u'lláh taught that

the love of Jesus must be extended to the whole world, not just to one's neighbour or family or nation.

Any of us can embrace these great truths as taught by these great souls and put them into practice in our own lives, but we should do so within the same framework that God in His goodness gave us as far back as our wanderings on the African plains: we must have faith that God has not made an incomprehensible, traitorous universe in which nothing can be known; we must continually bring our understanding into accord with a rational understanding of the world, and we must continually test our ideas against the great teachings of love from Buddha, Jesus, and Bahá'u'lláh.

Now let me address where I believe fundamentalism makes its error. Consider someone who has a large map printed on paper, and who must make some measurements from the map as accurately as possible. Suppose there is a drafting table available, with a sliding ruler such that positions and angles may be read off. Now we all know, from Euclidean geometry, that to unambiguously position a shape in two dimensions, all we need do is define two points. So let us hold the map on the table by putting a small piece of sticking

tape on one corner. As the tape covers more than two points, by Euclidean geometry it has fixed the map precisely, and so we can proceed to take our highly accurate measurements. Or can we? The tape isn't perfectly inelastic,

nor is the glue on the tape infinitely strong and rigid, neither is the paper perfectly flat and undeformable. In short, the rest of the paper, unfixed, will slip and slop this way and that and the measurements will be defective. By contrast, the wise person in this situation will spread the map as carefully as possible and fix it at least at all four corners before taking measurements. In other words, irrespective of the ‘proof’ that follows from Euclidean principles about one piece of tape in one corner, the wise person secures the entire picture against errors. Even by doing so there is no guarantee

104

Australian Bahá’í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

of perfection, but we do know that there are limits to how far the map can slip as we take our readings.

It is a philosophical version of this mistake that I think best describes the fundamentalist program. Whether the fundamentalist decrees Jesus or Muhammad or Bahá’u’lláh to be the infallible authority, they fix their teachings firmly to their map of reality in one corner and expect the whole map to

give infallible readings, regardless of the fact that we know we are fallible beings in a universe in which there is ‘many a slip between cup and lip’.

Thus, a fundamentalist fixes his belief in a religious text and decrees the sheer logic of the text to be the total basis of his understanding. Anything whatever that can be deduced from the text is accepted, no matter how unreasonable or how contrary to the obvious spirit of the religion’s teachings the

deduction may be. It seems to me that there is an arrogance in this process, as the fundamentalist is effectively saying that he can vouch absolutely for the correctness of the original text, translate and interpret it perfectly, and infallibly deduce its consequences.

My point is this: the way we fallible creatures are meant to learn about reality is not by such deduction, but by employing everything we can learn and understand about the world, although with the proviso that occasionally we may have to revise our picture when a deficient understanding is validly replaced with a better one.

The fundamentalist reasoning method is such a deficient paradigm, and the better one, namely bringing all our actions and understandings into accord with the love of God at every moment, has been taught by the great souls whom God has sent to guide the world. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taught us not to follow authority blindly in this fashion. He writes:

“If you find harmful teachings are being set forth by some individual no matter who that individual be, even though he should be my own son, know verily that I am completely severed from him... If... you see anyone whose deeds and conduct are contrary to and not in conformity with the good-pleasure of the Blessed Perfection and against the spirit of the “Hidden Words”, let that be your standard and criterion of judgment against him, for know that I am altogether severed from him no matter who he

may be. This is the truth.” (Promulgation of Universal Peace pp452-453)

We are here ordered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to check our actions against the standard of the spirit of the Hidden Words. This is a direct expression of the spirit of true faith which I have contrasted in this article with the deductive authoritarian spirit of fundamentalism.

The challenge for all members of all religions, therefore, is to bring one’s practice and understanding into accord with the universal principles of love and free rational enquiry that God has granted to us. When we find fellow believers following fundamentalist principles and overlooking the principles Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities

105

of love and justice, we should explain better ways of understanding that will permit them to let go of the fear that leads them to take refuge in fundamentalism.

The Philosophical Error

So on the one hand we have a view of gaining knowledge as logical deduction from inviolable first principles, and on the other, the way of faith whereby we adjust our understanding in accordance with the totality of the information available.

Before looking at the logical mistake that I believe underlies all the ideas I listed earlier, I must first stress that the issue I will examine here is not the

only common factor; various political, emotional, and ideological commonalities exist also, as well as a common heritage that can be traced historically (with only religious fundamentalism having completely distinct historical origins). But the issue I am considering is clear and provable and throws a great deal of light on many things we think we know about the world.

The error originated, at least in one instance, with the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776). Hume writes: “Even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience.” We have seen the sun come up every morning since time immemorial, but just maybe, so the argument goes, it won’t come up tomorrow (and no amount of theorising tonight can rule out the possibility). It is easy to

see from this how Popper can conclude that we can never confirm a scientific theory, only disprove one: no matter what the number of confirming instances for a theory, just maybe a disconfirming instance will pop up next time we do an experiment.

The Australian philosopher David Stove, in “Anything Goes; origins of the cult of scientific irrationalism” minutely dissects the logic of Hume’s argument and discovers a flaw in it. Stove gives Hume’s conclusion the title “scepticism about the unobserved” - that is there is no reason to believe any

contingent proposition about the unobserved (such as that the sun will come up tomorrow). He shows that this depends on two other propositions: (a) empiricism - that any reason to believe a contingent proposition about the unobserved is a proposition about the observed (for example, evidence of how the earth turns on its axis), and (b) inductive scepticism - that no proposition about the observed is a reason to believe a contingent proposition about

the unobserved (for example, our observations of the turning of the earth on its axis is no guarantee that it will turn at other times).

Tracing Hume's argument backwards, Stove discovers an unnoticed implicit assumption, and it is a big one: deductivism (in slightly simplified form, that something is a reason to believe another thing only if there is a logical

106

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

argument validly deducing the second from the first). The connection with the material in the previous part of this paper will now be immediately apparent. Popper's falsifiability criterion for science is a direct application of Hume.

Humanist irrationalism about the merits of science versus, say, voodooism or folk tales depends upon Kuhn's paradigm theory, which implicitly assumed the main results of Popper. An examination of deconstructionist and postmodern writings easily uncovers evidence of scepticism regarding anything that cannot be logically proved (for example, "all facts are theory-laden").

Modern economic theory is a classic example of meticulous logical/ mathematical deduction from axioms - except that the axioms do not correspond with reality. The loss of principles of natural rights in law also derives from the logical impossibility of proving the existence of these rights. Only religious fundamentalism seems to have a different provenance, going back in one case, for example, to Luther's establishment of the principle of biblical infallibility.

But now that the hidden assumption behind Hume is clear, we also see the impossibility of giving any rational credence to his argument. (Indeed, Hume himself rejected inductive scepticism in his old age.) For it is a commonplace that we as human beings cannot live without assuming that good reasons exist apart from pure logical deductions. We wake in the morning and open our eyes; never do we keep them shut out of consideration that there is no logical reason whatever to believe that the sun has come up and we will be able to see the room around us, and we put our feet on the floor, which we assume will still hold our weight; and so on. Of course, in any of these steps we 'might' be wrong. But so what? We are not infallible and we must expect occasional mistakes.

As I was thinking about this, it occurred to me that the deductivist assumption isn't even consistent - and the reason is simple, for human beings cannot make a logical argument without relying on memory to go from one step to the next, and we only have the previous reliability of our memory to

guarantee its future reliability. So every logical argument (for a human being in this universe) carries with it an implicit inductive argument!

Bahá'u'lláh's Prophecy

I promised you a prophecy. I believe there is a wonderful, if veiled, denunciation in Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the deconstructionist position. For

those who haven't seen this stuff before, I shall give a small sample from Derrida, the father of the movement. This was posted on an email list in response to a request from me for a sample of the best Derrida could produce:

“Differance is a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. Differance is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which

Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities

107

elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive (the “a” of differance indicates the indecision as regards activity and passivity, that which cannot yet be governed and organized by that opposition) of intervals without which the “full” terms could not signify, could not function.”

Perhaps the best comment one could make about this and similar passages comes from Gilbert and Sullivan:

“If you're anxious for to shine in the high aesthetic line
As a man of culture rare, You must get up all the germs of the transcendental terms
And plant them everywhere. You must lie upon the daisies and discourse
in novel phrases Of your complicated state of mind, The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter
Of a transcendental kind.”

(W.S. Gilbert: Bunthorne's song from “Patience”, 1881)

My correspondent also gave me the following from a disciple of Derrida's, Culler:

“The meaning of a word, it is plausible to claim, is what speakers mean by it. A word's meaning within the system of a language, what we find when we look up a word in the dictionary, is a result of the meaning speakers have given it in past acts of communication. And what is true of a word is true of language in general: the structure of the language, its system of norms and regularities, is a product of events, the result of prior speech acts. However, when we take this argument seriously and begin to look at the events which are said to determine structures, we find that every event is itself already determined and made possible by prior structures. The possibility of meaning something by an utterance is already inscribed in the structure of the language. The structures themselves are always products, but however far back we try to push, even when we try to imagine the “birth” of language and describe an ordinary event that might have produced the first structure, we discover that we must assume prior organization, prior differentiation. As in the case of causality we find only nonoriginary origins. If a cave man is to successfully inaugurate language by

making a special grunt signify “food,” we must suppose that the grunt is already distinguished from other grunts and that the world has already been divided into the categories of “food” and “nonfood” that allows food to be signified or the contrast between signifying elements that allows a sequence to function as a signifier.”

The inherent scepticism about knowledge that I have been discussing comes through loud and clear in this passage. The way of faith has no trouble with language: we know that we can speak with others, and we accept some possibility that we might be misunderstood, and we can take care to become

108 Australian Bahá'í
Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

better and better judges of what will be easily understood and what will confuse others, and to use this knowledge to become better communicators. But at no point do we feel the need to trace our words back through prehistory to be sure that some homo heidelbergensis ancestor had a good logical or observational ground for uttering the first word. (And by the way, even a bacterium can distinguish between food and non-food: you'll find very often that the key objections to deconstruction are almost farcically obvious.) If ever there was an example of taking the Cartesian program to excess, this would have to be it.

What would Bahá'u'lláh say about all this? In the Four Valleys, He relates the following:

“The story is told of a mystic knower, who went on a journey with a learned grammarian as his companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood lost in his reasonings, which were as words that are written on water. The knower called out to him, Why dost thou not follow? The grammarian answered, O Brother, I dare not advance. I must needs go back again. Then the knower cried, Forget what thou didst read in the books of Sibavayh and Qawlavayh, of Ibn-i-Hajib and Ibn-i-Malik, and cross the water.

“The death of self is needed here, not rhetoric: Be nothing, then, and walk upon the waves.”

The four writers Bahá'u'lláh mentions were the leading Arabic systematisers of the first four centuries of the Islamic era, and it is not hard to imagine that Bahá'u'lláh had in mind some such foggery as the example from

Culler above. But God puts His Manifestation's Words to work in surprising ways, and as a denunciation of the Derridaean insecurities (“there is nothing but the text”, “death of the author”, etc.), it simply cannot be excelled. We

find here a contradiction of every aspect of the deconstructionist program: the denial that study of grammar and rhetoric will lead to the really important insights; the absolute nature of the “Sea of Grandeur” and of “the

knower”;

and the spirit of faith in action without regard for rhetorical scepticism. And lastly, what better way to describe the words of one who believes that texts have no inherent meaning and that all there is is an endless play of word upon word as “words that are written on water”?

Where Do We Go from Here?

Anyone with familiarity with academe will be aware that (especially in America) the humanities nowadays operate virtually exclusively on a constellation of “academic left” presumptions including postmodernism and deconstruction. I don’t want to go into the intricacies of all the various philosophies on offer, except to make this one point: almost everywhere there is

Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities

109

disregard, and often contempt, for the empirical gathering of evidence in general and for science in particular. The decay of civic society and the increase

in every measure of social maladaptation (crime, homelessness, single motherhood, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc.) has tracked the adoption of this constellation of philosophies by society. Now I know that’s a controversial statement and we don’t have time to debate it here, as making this case involves

challenging thirty years of intellectual edifice-building; but let’s consider what

is going to happen next.

There is one final preliminary before we can peer into our crystal ball at the future, and that is this observation: at the end of the nineteenth century, scientists thought that all that remained to be done in understanding the world was to put “a few more decimal points” on the measurements. Well, we know what happened: the notion of the ether was apparently torpedoed by the Michelson-Morley experiment and observations of the orbits of the moons of Jupiter - but fortuitously Einstein had developed a theory that handled these facts (special relativity); and observations of the atom led to the discovery of

quantum mechanics, which, in the popular mind at least, dissolved the idea of a solid realistic universe. The modern twentieth century fascination with all forms of relativism is to a very large measure an outworking of that disappointment. In other words, the disastrous disbelief in “absolute reality” (to

quote a phrase of Bahá’u’lláh’s) that is poisoning our world originated in

large measure in the failure of nineteenth century physics.

This point is important: in the popular mind (and that includes humanities academics) absolute truth has been displaced by the two relativity theories (special and general) and the objective world has been disproved by quantum mechanics. I don’t have time to explain why, but all of these pop-scientific

ideas are fallacious.

Something else happened early this century: observations of distant galaxies showed a consistent red-shift, which was interpreted as similar to a Doppler effect due to the galaxies receding from us. This in turn led to the idea of an expanding universe. A solution to Einstein's equations of general relativity by Friedmann in 1922 required that the universe either expand or contract (in the absence of a cosmological constant), and it seemed that all these ideas fitted together: special and general relativity, with the observation-based theory of the origin of the universe, the big bang.

What if all these theories (SR, GR and the BB) were proven false?

Two-thirds of modern physics would be disproved, along with the current origin myth of our civilisation.

If the present relativist doctrines of the humanities resulted from the relatively minor earthquake in physics at the end of the nineteenth century, one

can only speculate on the effects of the collapse of most of modern physics.

In the session I shall distribute a photograph of a galaxy, Arp220, along with its near neighbours. The only problem is, whilst Arp220 has a low redshift,

110

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

those neighbours have high redshifts up to $z=0.5$, which is a recession velocity of half the speed of light! If you obtain the book "Seeing Red; redshifts, cosmology and academic science" by Halton Arp, you will find a wealth of evidence that redshifts are not in general due to recession velocity. The Big Bang is living on borrowed time, and when it goes, both general and special relativity will go (at least in their present form) with it.

I can't hope to prove in this talk what a catastrophic effect such a collapse of established certainties will have on western civilisation. I could talk about

the exhaltations of such irrationalists as the creationists and the deconstructionists, but the largest effects will be much more subtle and won't

happen in a day. Suffice it to say that relativism in all forms (epistemological,

moral, social) will sweep the field and leave anyone who believes in goodness or truth looking like a fool.

And which scientific theory will survive the catastrophe? Quantum mechanics!

The one theory so badly misunderstood in the humanities already and that is widely believed to be non-realist.

In brief, I believe that the outcome of such influences will be a dark age, dominated by privatisation, intellectual obscurantism and soulless application of technology. (In fact we are already on a trajectory towards that outcome, even without these developments.) Like the previous dark age, the human race cannot hope to emerge within a thousand years - and that assumes that big business will not, with the assistance of foolish national

governments, destroy the environment and cause an ecological collapse that kills

most or all of the human race. See “The Future of Capitalism” by Lester Thurow for comparison of conditions now and at the end of the Roman Empire. All the following characteristics apply to both periods:

- * commenced with a period of uncertainty! - NOT with an external shock
- * technologies did not disappear, but conditions made it impossible to apply them.
- * real per capita incomes fell dramatically
- * the rate of invention was up, production was down
- * social disorganisation and disintegration
- * public systems were privatised
- * private police forces
- * loss of civic pride
- * growing resentment to paying taxes
- * sell-off of public assets, ceasing of public investments
- * drop in literacy
- * falling incomes at the bottom of the social ladder
- * rise in religious fundamentalism
- * no vision of how one made a better life

Baha’is can stop all this. I believe that Baha’is must go back to the teachings of Baha’u’llah Himself and notice some highly salient facts, chief of

which is the complete absence of any non-realist teaching in the entire corpus of His writings. Baha’is must teach themselves the importance of science and empirical knowledge and open, tolerant societies, as Baha’u’llah recommended to Queen Victoria. Baha’is must free themselves both from the pernicious effects of both fundamentalism and the relativist doctrines taught Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities

111

today throughout the humanities disciplines.

If Baha’is do this, then when the world loses its faith, Baha’is will not lose theirs. The Divine Standard will be unfurled and the Nightingale of Paradise will warble its melody.

“O people of Baha! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the wellbeing and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.”

(Tablets of Baha’u’llah, 72)

Postscript: Kuhn

Kuhn’s theory of scientific paradigms is relevant to the material presented here. Simply, (perhaps too simply), it states that science falls into paradigms in which most scientists work and, from time to time, as a result of some kind of crisis, switches to a new, incommensurable paradigm. An example would be the change from Newtonian mechanics to relativity. Interpreted as a description of human psychology (namely that humans tend to follow a dominant idea until the idea becomes untenable and there is another idea available for adoption), the theory makes a lot of sense and explains neatly the reason why scientists are continuing to pursue the big bang theory. However, as a theory of truth or knowledge (that truth itself is not out there to be found and

that there is nothing more than whatever the dominant paradigm stipulates and that different paradigms are simply incommensurable) it is in sharp disagreement with Baha'u'llah and, indeed, is incoherent for reasons that doom every relativist theory of knowledge. Briefly, all relativist theories make at least one absolute statement, and Kuhn's is no different. Kuhn's theory itself represents a paradigm shift, but if a paradigm is no better than the paradigm it replaces, and if paradigms do not represent an approach to the truth, then Kuhn's own paradigm cannot be objectively any better than the idea of progress that it replaced. Simply, the mere statement of any relativist theory is selfnegating.

Bibliography

'Abdu'l-Bahá. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1982.

Arp, Halton: "Seeing Red; redshifts, cosmology and academic science". Apeiron, Montreal, 1998. This book contains amassed evidence contradictory to the big bang theory, and notes about a possible alternative to the current understanding of general relativity.

112 Australian Bahá'í Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

Bahá'í World Faith. *Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Wilmette, Illinois: 2nd Edn, 1953.

Bahá'u'lláh. *The Four Valleys*. In *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, A Compilation*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Dehli, 1986.

Bahá'u'lláh. *The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. In *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, A Compilation*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, New Dehli, 1986.

Ellis, John M.: "Against Deconstruction". Princeton University press, 1989. A hostile introduction to deconstruction.

Gross, Paul R. and Levitt, Norman: "Higher Superstition; the academic left and its quarrels with science". Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. This book documents and debunks the academic left's attack on science.

Stove, David: "Anything Goes; origins of the cult of scientific irrationalism".

Macleay Press, Paddington, Australia, 1998. A partly technical, yet highly entertaining demolition of the philosophies of Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, and Feyerabend.

Thurow, Lester: "The Future of Capitalism". Allen and Unwin 1996. An informed book about current and future trends in capitalism and economics;

it's a real surprise to find eight pages of warning about a dark age in a book like this.

Will, Frederick L.: "Induction and Justification; an investigation of Cartesian procedure in the philosophy of knowledge." A technical examination of the Cartesian philosophy of knowledge and an introduction to the structures of a better theory.

Windschuttle, Keith: "The Killing of History; how literary critics and social theorists are murdering our past". The Free Press (Simon and Schuster) 1996. Explains some of the bigger mistakes in postmodernist theory.

Aboriginal Health,
Healing, Spirituality,
Truth and Forgiveness
Diana rose Yoka

I wish to acknowledge Dr Vahid Payman for inviting me to give this presentation*, the Traditional Murrils of this land for their permission to speak, in particular, Lillian Colonel of the Jarowia people, and Beris Anning, director of Kumbari Nurapai Lag, and the mayor of Toowoomba, Councillor Dianne Thorley. I am not an academic but an experiential learner. In this presentation, I will use terms like "Dominant culture", "Wedjela", and "Gardiya", which refer to non-Aboriginal people.

This presentation is about love, healing and forgiveness, which can only take place when the truth is told. It is not about blame or guilt, for people present here today have little, if any, knowledge about the real circumstances surrounding the colonisation of this country. Indeed, I did not know that I was of Aboriginal descent until I was 50 years of age, and I guess my traditional people decided that I was finally mature enough to know the truth. Aboriginal people like myself don't want your pity; we want your humanity, your compassion and your understanding.

Past, Present, and Future operate on one continuum. There is only Now. And what happened Yesterday affects what is happening Today. What happens Today will affect what will happen Tomorrow.

We are here today together, to learn the truth, so we can make a difference and leave our children and our grandchildren memories and an inspiration that were our lives that will have changed the negative past into a positive future for white, black, and brindle (people of mixed heritage) alike.

Therefore, I respectfully ask all here to listen with your Hearts and not with your heads to this presentation, so you begin to feel the hurt and the pain of others.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "The injury of one shall be considered the injury of

* A presentation delivered at the ABS Conference on "Health, Healing, and Religion", Toowoomba,

September 30 - October 1, 2000.

114

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

all” (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 168), which means you should be able to appreciate the pain of your Aboriginal sisters and brothers, as you feel

the same pain for yourselves.

I will also say here and now, how much sorrow I feel for the Iranian friends who continue to be persecuted because of their adherence to the Faith. Your brothers and sisters, like Aboriginal brothers and sisters, are Deaths in Custody, the difference being that you are being persecuted for your Faith whilst

Aboriginal people are being persecuted for their race as well as for their religious beliefs. In July this year in Western Australia, Aboriginal people lost 7 people in custody in a space of 6 weeks. Locally, a twelve year old Murri boy has just been jailed. For what reason? His family does not know. We are now going to view 5-10 minutes of a video called “The Coolbaroo Club”, produced by urbanized Aboriginal people of Perth. At the conclusion of this brief footage, I will ask your opinion of what has been shown. If the people in this footage were members of your own race and family, would you be able to forgive the perpetrators?

We now return to how the colonisation of Australia occurred. In the 1700's, the colonisation of Aboriginal Australians began in New South Wales and spread to other parts of Australia. The British colonialists who occupied this country referred to it as “terra nullius”, unoccupied land. Yet this land was

owned and operated by Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. When the Indigenous inhabitants realised that the British intended to steal and not to share the land, the resistance and guerrilla warfare to the brutal colonisation of Aboriginal inhabitants began.

In the words of Kevin Gilbert, Aboriginal activist and print-maker:

As Aborigines began to sicken physically and psychologically, they were hit by the full blight of the alien way of thinking. They were hit by the intolerance and barbarism of a people intent on progress only in material terms, a people who never credited that there could be cathedrals of the spirit as well as of stone. It is my belief that Aboriginal Australia underwent a rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues in the minds of most blacks today.

Aboriginal people were referred to as “vermin”, “coons”, “niggers”, and

“animals”, to name a few discriminatory terms, and were likewise hunted by many of the Colonisers of this country, including the so-called “Famous Australian Explorers” and “Pastoralists”.

Oral histories of Aboriginal people report on the dismembering of their people whose body parts ended up in the British and European museums for purposes of study. Even today, those same museums are still refusing to

repatriate those remains to their descendants to allow a ceremonial reburial to occur.

Aboriginal Health, Healing, Spirituality, Truth and Forgiveness 115

Aboriginal traditional burials are varied, but I have been given permission to cite an example.

Once a person is considered deceased, they are interred facing east, in a hollow grave approximately 3 feet deep, which is lined with leaves and logs. The deceased is interred sitting up in the foetal position, so if they are not dead, they can climb out of the grave and resume their lives. If the person is obviously dead, their body will remain in situ for approximately 12 months and those remains will be given a ceremonial reburial. The grave itself will have a marker placed near it and sometimes a circle of grass will be burnt around it. In 12 months time, it will be green again, marking the position of the burial site.

The name of the deceased is not mentioned again for a time. Words that rhyme with the deceased person's name are not used, neither are plants and animals from which the name has been derived. The conception and birth sites are also avoided. The Kinship system takes precedence over personal preferences, and the loss of a dear one makes for imbalance in this system which has been given to Aboriginal people by their own Ancestor Lore Maker (Manifestation of God). Therefore, the break in continuity needs time to heal and repair so the harmony of the group is restored.

In the setting of the Dominant culture's hospital system, it is deeply offensive to Aboriginal people to have their deceased relatives subjected to the

dismembering of their body parts, namely, the removal of their brains and hearts etc during autopsy, for the purposes of Gardiya study.

People of the Jewish Faith are not treated with such contempt. Indeed, the Rabbi is summoned once death is pronounced and the body of the deceased is removed and buried the next day according to the rites of the Jewish Faith. Aboriginal people need to be consulted in the Hospital setting and often require a traditional 'smoking and wailing ceremony', which could take place

away from smoke alarms and other hospital patients, if a special area was set aside for such purposes.

In urbanized areas like Perth, once an Aboriginal person dies, the people there often do not have the amount of money needed to hire a funeral parlor to bury their relative. It often takes 2 weeks for extended kin to raise the necessary funding for even a deposit. In addition, if an Aboriginal person dies at home, unless money is available, the relevant health authorities refuse to remove the body until funds are obtained. This type of discrimination would not be tolerated by Wedjelas, who usually bury their loved one within three days.

Giving birth is also a sacred act. Baha'u'llah says that "the soul is given

to the child upon conception". Aboriginal people say that, "a spirit child

is

put there in the mother's womb."

The wise older woman will take the pregnant young mother to-be to a

116

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

sacred woman's place. The ground is sterilized by spinifex, which is fired up, and sterilising herbs are added to the fire, producing sterilising smoke, which the young girl is asked to straddle so the aromatic smoke can engulf her body. The older woman then leads the young girl to a birthing tree and she instructs the girl to squat down while she massages the spine in a circular motion. The squatting girl braces herself up against the tree and braces herself while pushing to help the baby in its descent from the womb. The older woman scrapes out a hollow in the ground to receive the baby, and when it is born she cuts the umbilical cord with her teeth and buries the afterbirth in the

depression. She then moves away with the baby from the young mother, and breathes into the nostrils the names of the child's totems that acknowledge his indebtedness to, and respect for, the plants, animals and earth. The baby is then wrapped in paperbark and returned to the mother in a coolamun (bark carrying dish). The mother and wise older woman remain in seclusion for a few days and then return to the group where the newborn is greeted with ceremony and joy.

The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah state: "Know ye not why We have created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other".

Aboriginal people traditionally have an egalitarian society, unlike Dominant culture, whose society is based on Feudalism and divide and rule.

From George, a traditional man cited in *The Survival Dreaming* by Peter McCloy:

Why would I want to set myself above my people? To do so would interfere with our kinship, I would not be able to assume any position of real leadership if I set myself apart from the other elders or the people. For us, leadership brings obligation, not privilege, unless you count it as a privilege to serve. Why would we want to change that for your system? How can people claim to be leaders, when their method of gaining this position is by creating division." "In our society", says

George,"everyone

shares responsibility for the welfare of the land and the people, but in your society you elect politicians and you blame your lack of responsibility on them.

In the book, *Indigenous Education*, by Bill Barnes, Bahá'u'lláh is quoted as saying: "By one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education." Bill Barnes goes on to say:

We start at the Source, which for human beings is the archaic, the primitive and the indigenous... The indigenous is at the center of education. Education must start at the centre, with Revelation, which is the

social purpose gained from the indigenous vision of Revelation animating the indigenous powers, and work out from there. The indigenous powers are the universal powers restored at the origin and centre by Revelation.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh also says hunting is not forbidden, but

it must not be done to excess. This implies land rights for Aboriginal people, and Rúhíyyih Khánúm, I have been told, also advocated land rights. It is time, I believe, that the Australian Bahá'í Community supported Aboriginal people with regard to issues of justice.

My Aboriginality came as a result of payback. I had a Gardiya great grandfather who committed atrocities with his mates at La Grange in 1865. Under tribal law, a member of that family was paid back for those atrocities. In this instance, my white grandmother, who gave birth to an Aboriginal boy who was murdered, gave birth a year later to my Mother, who was fair enough to be passed off as white but was abused by her mother, who blamed Mum for the circumstances surrounding her conception. Mum's mother was Edith Cowan's first cousin, and Edith Cowan's father-in-law, Walkingshaw, was a Native Protector from York. Walkingshaw was a decent man, who actually did protect the Natives, unlike his contemporaries, and his son John married an Aboriginal woman, Matilda, from Blackwood station.

I would also like to say a few words about Edith Cowan, the first woman member of Parliament in Australia. Edith Cowan's main interest was in social welfare and together with some of her contemporaries, she established the Karrakatta Club of Perth, Western Australia. These women formed the Women's Service Guild and their aims were as follows:

- 1) To educate women on moral, social and economic questions and the disadvantages of the use of alcohol as a beverage.
- 2) To support from the standpoint of women any movement to protect, defend or uplift humanity.
- 3) To be loyal citizens of State, Commonwealth and Empire.
- 4) To seek public good and not personal advantage.
- 5) To establish equal rights of citizenship for both men and women.
- 6) To form a link, through national, Empire, and international affiliations, with women throughout the world.
- 7) To provide a common ground on which women of all shades of thought and opinion can meet.

A similar organisation was formed in the state of Western Australia, whose aims were as follows:

- 1) To establish a bond of union between the various affiliated societies

- 2) To advance the interests of women and children and of humanity in general
- 4) To confer on questions relating to the welfare of the family, the state, and the commonwealth.

Returning to the subject of my interaction with my mother, Mum abused my sister and I, although she did have some positive interactions with me. Because Mum's identity had to be hidden, she was sent to an up-market boarding school called Koobeelia at Katanning in the south west of Western Australia. She learnt everything to survive, from reading and writing, to handling money, bookkeeping, academic work, gardening, cooking, sewing, washing, ironing, and cleaning. Mum was a Jill-of-all-trades and mistress of them all. I am the eldest of five siblings so Mum knew nutrition sufficiently well to feed us all properly. She also trained as a Nurse at Princess Margaret Hospital in Perth and used to go flying with the flying doctor

to various parts of Western Australia. Mum was a brilliant nurse, who was excellent with other people's children, but she despised my sister and I because of what her white mother had done to her.

A few lines of my poem "Void" describes Mum's interactions with me: I was her punching bag, my head smashed against walls, the boxingring of life, for I was always in strife. I was shocked and bewildered, a small child, not understanding, why I did not fit in, why, what did I do to deserve this, in a world I never made?

I was privileged to meet my tribal grandfather in 1944 at Brown Hill Boulder Kalgoorlie. He was the payback man that I have previously mentioned. He took me for walks with him and also, to his credit, he apologised for what he did (taking advantage of my white grandmother by using love-magic). That old man taught me to respect everyone regardless of caste, creed or colour, and he taught me to be a servant of the people. I was also taught about the atrocities committed by my white great grandfather, and was informed that my job was to restore honour to the black and white history of my family by exposing the truth. Later, when Dad returned from World War II, I ran away with grandfather again, but the miners came up after me with guns and were going to shoot him in front of me. I yelled at them and saved his life, as well as saving the lives of the women, young men and children. The last I ever saw of him he was walking free back out into the desert. But his spirit has been with me ever since that day, which occurred when I was two and a half years of age.

A year after the event with my grandfather, my mother called me into the dining room and she presented me with an Oxford Dictionary to teach me to read. She also gave me simple books on other people's cultures, mythology, Aboriginal Health, Healing, Spirituality, Truth and Forgiveness

119

and a picture book on Comparative Religions. Later, at the first one-teacher school of 14 children, the teacher there made us learn about Persian History of the 19th century, and it was there, at the age of 5 years, that I learnt

about a

“political dissident” called “The Báb”. When I heard his story, I informed the

Catholic teacher, “that Man was a Man of God and I shall follow Him”. ..for which statement I was given the cane. In fact, because I did not understand Mathematics, and the Gardiya way in which it was taught, I frequently was given the cane. Some of the Catholic children there stoned me and beat me, and one child, who was physically mature, tried to rape me. My mother’s response to those events was: “Get out of my sight, I wish you were dead, I wish you had never been born, I don’t want to know you, or anything about you”. My mother was abused the same way by her Gardiya mother, and, because she was starved of love and affection, she was incapable of feeling for her daughters.

Life at school was so bad for me that I could not cope with it any more, and, one day, I ran away from school out into the desert. In those times, Afghans and their camels brought fruit, vegetables, and pots and pans to the mining towns in Western Australia, so when I thought I was alone, and was crying by myself, I was amazed to hear a Voice from No-where asking me why I was crying. I saw an old man with a fez and a grey coat, he also had a snow white beard and the bluest eyes I had ever seen. I knew because of His vibrations and the Light around His body that He was not one of those “Afghans”, indeed we had an amazing conversation which pointed me in the direction of Progressive Revelation about which I talked to Church officials and for which I was abused continually, and He told me that my parents would never know me or ever understand me. And was I willing to do as He asked me, especially and most importantly to always strive to “Tell the Truth”

no matter what was done to me, so I agreed, but asked Him for courage and Divine Protection, which He agreed to give me.

My family moved to Queensland in 1949, and I attended various schools there, and the abuses continued by teachers as well. In one incident, I was caned in front of the whole school for saying “hullo” to two identifiable Aboriginal youths. In another incident, a teacher hit me over the back of the head

with a book called “The Third Reich” and he threatened to kill me if I told my parents, so I walked in my sleep and screamed the place down for 6 months.

So my parents sent me to another school and, unfortunately, I was put into a Catholic Priest’s class for Religious instruction, and I was denounced as a heretic and was caned and the yard stick was used on my spine which was fractured in several places. I was never taken to a doctor by my mother, I usually used to go by myself, but there was no point in going when the whole district turned against me and I was described as being ‘contaminated’ and all children were instructed to avoid me. I have never recovered from that

120

Australian Bahá’í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

incident, I did not reach puberty until I was nearly 17 years of age and this

came with a Kundalini awakening, and later when I was 18 years of age, I went nursing with childhood fractures of the skull and other parts of my body, a very bad scoliosis, and chronic exhaustion from Meningitis, which I had in 1949 without antibiotic treatment.

I was a nurse for 35 years and worked in medical and surgical nursing as well as with children, orthopaedics, geriatrics, palliative care, and psychiatry, to name a few. I became a Nurse Educator without the university degree,

and an assistant manager of a retirement village, but in spite of my achievements, I had no sense of self in which to have any confidence or esteem.

It was not until I began to understand Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Words where He says, "Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself, rise then unto that for which thou hast been created", that I began to make sense of my life. Up to that stage I was so put down, that not only did I not have a sense of self, I was totally unaware of my own repressed anger, and of the effect I was having on other people. I was told one day by a friend that I did not accept myself. That statement really touched my inner being, and I burst into tears and began to write out my feelings for the first time in my life:

"Do you see this little child, she never had a chance, all she wanted was acceptance, all she wanted was a loving glance, but all she ever got each day was ridicule and scorn, I wish you were dead the Mum said, I wish you had never been born". As I explored my own issues, I became aware they were the same issues for the stolen generation and anybody who is labelled "different" or "queer" or "eccentric" etc, and I became aware that I was not alone.

Most of my life I was subjected to name calling such as 'moron', 'mongrel', 'lazy-good-for-nothing', 'spineless', 'useless', 'you'll never amount to anything', etc, which, as Bahá'u'lláh says, very badly affects people even

more than the power of the sword. "Sticks and Stones will break your bones, but names will never hurt you" was the childish song sung by most children in the 1940's and 50's, but name-calling does hurt children and I have no doubt it is responsible for the Australian population having the highest suicide rate in the world. After all, if you tell a child they will never amount to

nothing... 'nothing' is annihilation, it means you won't have a job, earn money,

have a girl-friend, etc. I am also sure this is why young people break into houses. If gardiya people won't employ them, they will take what doesn't belong to them, on the basis of unconscious payback.

In 1990, I was told that I was of Aboriginal descent by an Elder I met in New South Wales, and since that time, I have been working through my own 'issues of identity' with support from Aboriginal people who have set up their own Medical and Counselling services around Australia.

Aboriginal people are very diverse and there are many success stories, which are rarely mentioned by the media, which only focuses on negativity.

In Australian universities, it is a policy that Aboriginal people are targeted as objects of study by people studying social work, psychology, and related health sciences. Aborigines are fed up with being treated with such contempt, because families are still being invaded by do-gooders and children are still being taken away.

As Pat Dugeon and Darlene Oxenham say regarding white academic colonisation of their culture: "That Aboriginal people are exploited for data.

What benefits do the source community obtain for the papers, books, PhD's and employment that are gained by studying Aboriginal people?"

That ownership of this data then, transformed into processed information, allows arrogation to an expert status and entrenches non-Aboriginal positions of power and influence of Aboriginal Affairs and so affects Aboriginal self-determination. Western concepts, (psychological and social) must

be seen as reflecting that culture and as such are inappropriate for assessments/appraisal/ understanding of Aboriginal culture.

In conclusion, until Dominant culture acknowledges the shared history of the colonisation of Australia, until this alien culture addresses its own issues

and studies its own race to find out why they have difficulties dealing with their own issues, there can be no final reconciliation, in spite of the many wonderful, caring, and loving interactions that are finally occurring with both groups.

My challenge to the Bahá'í community is that I hope you will write letters to the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and request that The Universal House of Justice takes an interest in Indigenous communities around the world, so that they can be an advocate for justice in the same way that they are advocates for the Iranian friends.

Nelson Mandela says that his heroes are women and men of good will regardless of status. May the Bahá'í community agree with this view and may we all go together, hand in hand, to 'defend the victim of oppression' as

we would also like to be defended.

The following is from my poem, "Nobody":

For they were gentle souls, whose deeds go unsung, except in the memory of God who knew their worth and gave them in the world of spirit, much higher rungs. They would not have wanted a Eulogy written about them on several pages, for they were unsung heroes, rocks for all ages. They were but a thread of life woven by the Eternal Mind, and they fulfilled God's destiny for them, which was to till the soil and sod of this precious time. For they were no less an equal in the Eyes of God's sweet Grace, they were not Nobodies but Somebodies worthy of an Eternal Place.

Bibliography:

Oral Histories:

The Coolbaroo Club Ronin Films available from Early Childhood Education
Royal Street East Perth WA.

The Survival Dreaming by Peter McCloy (1995) published by Management
Interface Pty Ltd Sydney

The Complexity of Aboriginal Diversity (1989) Identity and Kindredness in
BLACK VOICES vol 5 no 1, James Cook University Townsville Queensland , Pat
Dudgeon and Darlene Oxenham.

The Aboriginal Justice Council July 2000 Issue: "On any one Day in Western
Australia:

6% of all Aboriginal men are in prison

6% of all Aboriginal men are on community supervision orders

.5% of all Aboriginal women are in prison.

2% of all Aboriginal women are on community supervision orders

9% of all young Aboriginal people aged between 10 and 17 years are under
community supervision and 1.5% of all Aboriginal youths are in detention.

A rape of the Soul so profound by Peter Read (1999) Allen and Unwin

Another video not mentioned in this presentation available from SBS:

" Stolen Generations" screened July 2000 Naidoc Week Celebrations:

Key points include:

- Most whites knew that Aboriginal people were being murdered in large numbers
- the demise of the Aboriginal population due to being shot, diseases, and drinking poisoned water.

- At the time there were few white women, so the white men had sexual liaisons with Aboriginal women.

- The government stopped the integration of Aboriginal people with white settlers because they saw the Aboriginal population as : a security threat, morally corrupt, and racially unhygienic.

- There was an increase in "half-caste populations" which outnumbered the European population, and this was responsible for children being "taken away".

- Government reserves, missions, and cattle stations, were in control of children of Aboriginal descent being taken away.

The 1905 act allowed the removal of children from their families. The Tindale stud book (called that by Aboriginal people) under the forced assimilation policy said that: 1 full blood with a half-caste equalled a three-quarter-caste;

a three quarter caste with one quadroon equalled a half-caste; this was the Eugenics principle through breeding out the "full bloods" to improve Aboriginal people by breeding out their" impurities and colour".

"Indigenous Education: Rebuilding Civilisation", Bill Barnes, Daystar International School, Japan.

Bahá'í References

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*. London: Nightingale Books, 1992.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre: 1982.

124

Australian Bahá'í

Studies, Vol. 3, 2001

CONTRIBUTORS

Kiser Barnes is a member of the Universal House of Justice, the world governing body of the Bahá'í Faith.

Paul Friedman is a Fellow of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians and a specialist in rehabilitation and geriatric medicine.

Ron House is a lecturer in applied computer science at the University of Southern Queensland.

Peter J. Khan is a member of the Universal House of Justice, the world governing body of the Bahá'í Faith.

Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei is a researcher in the Faculty of Education at Monash University.

Mark T. Wood, is a psychologist, inventor, and recently a tutor in Statistics and Business Communication at Griffith University.

Diana rose Yoka is a trained nurse and has an Advanced Diploma of Environmental Art and Design from Midland College of Tafe, Western Australia.